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Patches and Pomander

Patches and Pomander

A Novel

BY

ARTHUR BREBNER

AUTHOR OF 'JOHN SAINT'

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CONTENTS.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. THE QUEST	1
II. THE DUTCH GALIOT	15
III. SOME PASSAGES AT AN INN	26
IV. CHILDE ROWLAND TO THE DARK TOWER CAME	45
V. THE SEALED PACKET	61
VI. THE WHITE ROAD TO LONDON	75
VII. WHICH TREATS OF A RESCUE AND A BALLAD	86
VIII. AT THE SIGN OF THE "ELZEVIR"	99
IX. THE GLAMOUR OF THE STREETS	113
X. THE FLOWER OF GRACIOUS STREET	125
XI. MY LADY CASTLEMAINE	139
XII. A CLOUD	154
XIII. THREE AND AN EXPLORATION	170
XIV. A LOYAL TOAST	182
XV. THE ACTIVITIES OF PETER	192
XVI. SOME RECOLLECTIONS OF LAVERICK	202
XVII. CONCERNING A <i>RENCONTRE</i>	213
XVIII. A GAME OF CHESS	221
XIX. A DIFFICULT FRIENDSHIP	234
XX. THE LAST OF THE <i>ESPIRITU SANTO</i>	243

XXI. MY LADY'S PREPARATIONS	254
XXII. THE COMIC TRAGEDY	264
XXIII. THE GREAT ARCANUM	280
XXIV OFF LOWESTOFFE, JUNE 3RD, 1665	292
XXV. IN WHICH CHARLES IS QUIT OF SOME ANXIETIES	302
EPILOGUE	318

Patches and Pomander.

CHAPTER I.

THE QUEST.

It was in the year 1658 that Simon Rutherford first came to live at the house on the moor, there to end his days in peace and make, if possible, the *amende honorable* to God. A desolate place and a melancholy, with its stepped gables, twisted chimney stacks, fantastic gargoyles; melancholy, indeed, with its few sour roods of half-hearted tillage on the landward side and its ragged clump of pines towards the sea.

“How roars the wind, and what a night ’twill be yonder with the spume and the scud!”

He was seated in an upper chamber of the keep, the oldest part of the building, yet one that had received the fewest injuries from time and weather.

A great square room, with walls of roughened stone and deep embrasured windows, and with the firelight casting strange shadows of alembic and crucible and a monstrous shadow of the man himself.

A Geneva Bible, thumbed and marked, was on his knees, and he read as one in haste.

"I cannot find the passage, my eyes are strangely dim."

Presently he laid the book aside and stirred the sea-coal to a blaze, and there was a hunted look in his face as he peered between the bars.

"How terrible is death on such a night as this, and what a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God! for those who have yet their burden upon them, for those who are yet in the Valley of the Shadow, for those who have not yet found the living grace. But I—I have sought it and found it, I have wrestled for it at night, in the deep and dark night, even as Jacob wrestled at Peniel. But how terrible is death!"

The wind moaned through the pines and on the upland moor. He listened awhile, then began turning the pages of his Bible again with a fierce eagerness.

"There is a mist at my eyes. The words, let me

see the words, 'Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins . . .'

The book slipped from his hand and he fell to pacing the room to and fro.

"Is there no place for repentance? O God, God, I am old, old, and my days—swifter than a weaver's shuttle."

The sougning of the pines, the turmoil that the wind made in the chimney, the monody of the distant sea oppressed him, and he shuddered as he sat down by the cheeks of the fire to stare again at the fantastic sculpture of the coals. For there were faces there, faces that he had known, faces long since dead, while strangely intermingled, complete in every spar, there swung the very semblance of a ship.

He gazed in a kind of fascination, his lips moving, till suddenly the settling of the coals broke the spell.

"Ugh! my imagination plays me tricks. I am old, and yet—a few short months will serve—five, four—let me see, let me see."

He rose from his seat and lighting a lamp that hung from the oaken roof began to peer into alembic and crucible.

"This must be left closed in balneo and this tinted in sand heat, yes, yes, and this is at fixation, good, and this——"

He looked into a large earthen retort with eager eyes, then stepping back steadied himself against the table. "Ascension!" he cried with an intake of the breath, "ascension! the work is done I have projection in a week."

Therewith he fell to pacing the room to and fro like a caged animal.

"In ascension, yes, surely yes."

Again he peered into the retort, his eyes aflame with triumph.

"Gold, gold, gold, infinite gold, and the splendour of the Cæsars shall be penury and the riot of Heliogabalus a jest if—if only——"

He stopped abruptly. His eyes had wandered to the Geneva Bible fallen to the floor, and the light faded from his face.

"If only I had youth."

The wind was striking mournful chords in the pine trees, a hopeless music.

"Too late, too late; oh! if I had only youth—and yet there may be time—they say the elixir is but a step beyond—Lully, Valentine, Bernard of Trèves, Koudenburg—what says Koudenburg?"

He took a folio from the floor and turned its yellow pages with a trembling hand.

"Koudenburg, a sweet artist, I saw his house at

Bruges, they say he had projection the day he died, a bitter fate——”

“What! Uncle, still at the quest?” A young man was standing in the doorway, his face ruddy with exercise and winter.

“Aye, lad, still at the quest. But what’s o’clock?”

“It has just chimed four, down in the village yonder.”

“Four, so late; and the day?”

“Friday, to be sure. Why! Uncle, you’ll be forgetting your own name next.”

Simon Rutherford passed his hand over his forehead in a dazed kind of fashion.

“Four is it, and Friday? Ah! I had forgotten. I have an appointment.”

He rose unsteadily to his feet.

“Uncle, you are ill?”

“No, no, it is nothing, a passing faintness. I have been working too much of late perhaps, but the time is short. Nephew, my cloak.”

He stood erect, a gaunt figure of a man.

“My cloak, so; that pistol too. I shall be gone two hours. Can I trust you, Anthony?”

“Uncle, you know——”

“Aye, ’tis a good lad, but for your life look to the register and keep that beech-coal at the same dull heat. Two hours, then.”

The sun was sinking redly behind a bank of storm cloud, and in the wind's eye the sky was heavy with weather. Whiplike sleet cut the face of old Simon Rutherford as he made his way with difficulty along the lane, and on reaching the open down the press of wind nearly brought him to a standstill. A headland to the westward was almost hidden by streamers, the clouds low above him raced like wild huntsmen, and all the air pulsed to the sea's anger.

"I doubt if he will come on such a day as this," he muttered, "and I was foolish not to take the lower road."

Steadying himself against a post, he stood looking down the narrow and precipitous path that led to the beach.

"It would have been safer, much safer, and yet they shall never have that excuse to say that I failed them."

With the soil so wet and slippery and the wind so high it would have been an attempt sufficiently hazardous even for one in the prime of life, but the old man, nothing shaken, managed with the aid of a stout stick he carried and such tufts of grass and sea-broom as presented themselves to make the descent in safety. Here on the beach, within the shelter of the cliff, he stood awhile watching with

a sort of grim satisfaction the cruel and savage turmoil of the sea.

"It is Mr Simon Rutherford in my poor opinion."

The old man turned sharply; a stranger was close at hand.

"That is my name. You come from——"

"Yes, that's where I come from, but Rowley will have to get some one else to do his confounded errands another time: six days of muddy road and at the end—this——"

He shrugged his shoulders and seating himself on a boulder began knocking the clay from his heel with a riding-whip.

"You see," he went on, "this may seem a very desirable place to spend a winter's afternoon to those gallanting seagulls over there, but for a poor human gentleman, accustomed to the amenities of town—Yes, Rowley will have to get some one else to do his damned errands."

"So the young men lack hardihood nowadays," said Simon, eyeing him with disfavour.

The stranger looked around him at the driving clouds and the sea, finally into the face of his companion.

"But why do people live in such places?"

"Lack hardihood, young sir, not so their fathers."

"Well, well, every man to his trade, but cutting

throats I take it is a paltry way of earning a living."

"'Twas for the cause," returned the other sternly.

"Ah! yes, yes, so say they all. But let me see—

‘Call Fire and Sword and Desolation,
A Godly thorough Reformation.’

Man, the piece is absolute, and Rowley has it by heart, I think——"

"You have money for me," said the old man impatiently; "but this is too boisterous for business," he continued, and turning on his heel, led the way for about a quarter of a mile along the beach till they came to a break in the line of cliffs. Here he stopped and pointed to the mouth of a cave half hidden by broom.

"This will serve."

"Hospitality itself," cried the courtier, and Simon Rutherford, going first, lit a candle by the aid of flint and steel and thrust it into a rusty ring-bolt in the wall.

"Now, sir, I am ready!"

But the young man had seated himself on a ledge of rock and was gazing quizzically about him.

"What a palace indeed—for a Troglodyte!"

He had flung off his hat, and Simon Rutherford stood looking at his handsome face and keen eye, not without admiration.

"The Saints have had worse dwelling-places than this, young sir!"

"Yes, but you see I'm not a saint, have no talent that way, and indeed one rarely meets them nowadays since Oliver bit the dust."

"'Tis an evil Court!"

"Evil! Why, man, what with courtiers and courtezans and corantos, 'tis the most absolute Court since Anthony was beguiled. However, this is not business; I have money for you!"

"How much?" queried the old man.

"Two hundred and fifty pounds in gold, the rest a bill at three months on Master Bakewell——"

"Ah! I thought as much; but paper, I do not like paper."

His companion eyed him curiously.

"You speak dogmatically—for a subject!"

"I tell you I want gold."

"And doesn't Charles want gold? Begad, what with distressed cavaliers and insatiable landabrides, he's poorer now than ever he was at the Hague."

Simon Rutherford counted out the money with eager fingers, the other watching him the while. Without was the booming of the surf.

"It must have been a very great service that induces him to part with so much money," said the courtier, "and Parliament fractious too."

"It is a very great service."

"Is, is, eh! Begad this is becoming interesting."

"Here is the receipt, sir, and as for this bill at three months, frankly, I do not like it."

"'Is' a very great service, eh! I smell a rat, and the king must be a much deeper dog than we think him."

"You may tell him that sent you, sir, that I will take no more bills in the future."

"A Fifth Monarchy man to ruffle it like this. Why, they've hardly so much as squeaked since Harrison danced on air."

"You will remember my message," said Simon drily.

"But you are a Fifth Monarchy man, sir, surely. One of the 'Saints,' one of the 'Grace Aboundings,' one of Noll's 'Hew Agags' who smote the accurst, smote them hip and thigh from Kadesh-Barnea even unto the Valley of Ammon."

"As you say, sir—in storm and siege and battle—smote them."

"The retort absolute," laughed the other, "and the old Adam of carnal vainglory still there, I find."

"You have the receipt, sir, which I think completes the business."

"Hardly," said the courtier, rising; "I want to know what that money has been paid for."

"You are impertinent, sir!"

"So you refuse to tell me?"

"Absolutely."

The candle cast their distorted shadows on the walls as they stood facing each other. Without was the booming of the surf.

"I should have thought an old man would have been better advised."

"You mean to rob me."

"Your gold is as safe as in Lombard Street, but I want this secret. Come, now!"

Simon Rutherford was fumbling in his cloak.

"Where did I put the bag? You want gold—all men want gold. I have lost it—no."

And he covered his opponent with a pistol.

"Pshaw! I might have guessed that."

"The times are dangerous, Sir Rupert."

"So the old fox knows me."

"I do now, at any rate."

"Fairly mated," laughed the other.

"I had already heard of you," continued the old man sardonically; "some echoes of that wicked Babylon reach us even here. But for Sir Rupert

Bligh to play the swasher—surely the times are changed.”

The courtier shrugged his shoulders and sat down on the ledge again.

“I think we’ve had enough of sermons,” said he, “of wrestlings, and fastings and psalmody. The point just now is—your secret.”

“Well?”

“Well—name your price.”

“I have no price.”

“But think of it, Master Rutherford, this sallow, sweet and subtle gold—think of it.”

“You speak as a man of this world.”

“One world at a time, say I. Come, your price.”

“I tell you I have no price.”

“But think again, Master Rutherford, this powerful yellow thing, this key that will unlock all doors——”

“Save the door of the kingdom of heaven.”

“Even that, as some say.”

The old man passed his hand over his forehead.

“Sir Rupert, you are young and at the very acme of your manhood, but life is a grim business.”

The young man eyed him curiously. “A game and play of chess. Eh!”

“With the Fates.”

And they were silent awhile, both listening to

the plaining of the wind and the sorrowful outcry of the gulls.

"We view the matter differently, Master Rutherford; you that are in the Fifth Act, I in the press and hurry of the First. Your wine is on the lees, mine at the brim."

"And if it prove sour, Sir Courtier, what then?"

"Fling it away, like bastard canary—but come, I caught a glint in your eyes just now when you were counting the gold, the very crooking of your fingers told tales, and I'm no chapman, no haggler, a few paltry acres more or less——"

"You speak as if you had Golconda in fee."

"Even that, perhaps, one day, if Mercury——"

"What!" laughed the old man, "is Saul also among the prophets, and does fiddling and rhyming and drinking and worse leave you any time for these mysteries?"

"You may laugh, Master Rutherford, but——"

"What! something new in the world, a philosophic rakehell, one night in the gutter, the next at Panarchic knowledge, a Rosicrucian. Eh!"

The young man looked at him eagerly. "Are you a seeker?" he asked.

"Perhaps."

"You know Minnick of Amsterdam?"

“A quack, a mere ‘pretender.’”

“De Hautôt of Havre, then?”

“Another one.”

“Was Koudenburg of Bruges an impostor then?”

“No, his was the way of truth.”

“Even to projection.”

“You speak, sir, as a dilettante unworthy of the esoteric wisdom—one that thinks to reach the prize without the labour and the fasting.”

Sir Rupert laughed.

“The old cant. Ah! well. And so it chanced that when the honest party had been finally drubbed, and the days of pike and culverin were at an end, Master Rutherford betook himself to psalmody and repentance, midnight oil and Albertus Magnus.”

“Our business is at an end, Sir Rupert.”

“Yes, yes, quite at an end. And so this is the great secret, eh? And this is what Carolus Rex, Defender of the Faith, &c., &c., has sent me here for?—a sprat to catch a whale, the Philosopher’s Stone, forsooth. But the poor man needs it. Begad, there’s nothing else that I can think of will ever satisfy his *bona-robas*. Master Rutherford, I wish you good-night.”

CHAPTER II.

THE DUTCH GALIOT.

THE village of Wrenford, though still boasting some coastwise trade, had fallen of late into a state of desuetude. Royalist to a man during the troubles, it had given of its best, and many the bonny brown-faced lad that had jingled down its long street and returned not. A forgotten place, hidden in the hollow of the hills, with its straggling line of cottages, its decaying wharf, its ancient mill, its grey and wind-worn church.

It was at the inn here that Sir Rupert had stabled his horse, and, as he made his way along the beach, pleasant visions of a supper and clear fire came to mind. Moreover, he was entirely satisfied with the work of the afternoon, and dwelt with much contentment on the influence he might acquire thereby over his dread sovereign and boon companion.

"So this was the riddle," thought he, "the Philosopher's Stone, no less, and indeed that same sour-visaged Fifth-Monarchy man spoke as one in authority—perhaps even——"

Sir Rupert stood stock still.

"Perhaps he has it; he was absolute enough; and though Charles Rex is well, the great Arcanum's much better. Surely Rowley must have some reason for his faith, and it might be just as well to propitiate this psalm-singing rascal."

And Sir Rupert was in some perplexity till the vision of sippets of bacon on a white dish decided him in favour of the inn.

A turn round the foot of the cliff brought with it the full force of the gale. Spatters of scud caught from the crests of waves stung him in the face, and the wind pressed against him like a living thing; wisps of clouds, flying battalions, hurried across the face of the moon, and, as he listened to the thunders of the surf and the outcries of the tortured land, he felt an exaltation as of music.

"They would dash the life out of one," thought he, "as out of a dog. What care these roarers?"

And Whitehall, with its shadow-shapes, became grotesque and pitiful.

But now above the hooting of the wind and scream of shingle there came the distant sound of shouting, and hastening forwards, he came in sight of the jetty, where a crowd of men and women—the whole village nearly—stood watching the agonies of a vessel trying to make for safety. It was a galiot, Dutch-built, dangerously near in-shore, with the seas spouting against the tall stern, and covering her from time to time in a scurry of mist and foam. Part of the forward bulwarks had been swept away, while the topsail, torn to shreds, made a noise like pistol shots as it streamed before the wind.

“What vessel’s that?” asked Sir Rupert as he joined the onlookers.

“Small use to know what she is,” said a fisherman; “she that’s on the rocks in a minute, may the Lord have mercy upon them.”

“Nonsense, a squarehead by the cut of her, Scheveningen way. She’ll win through if they know their business.”

The man eyed him with astonishment.

“And who may you be?” he began, but his speech was interrupted by eager cries of “Look! Look!” and a sob from one of the women. A heavy sea had struck her counter, and she was shivering like a whipped animal.

"She'll broach to," gasped one.

"No, no," cried Sir Rupert, "your Dutchman is a seaman; she'll wear round, yes—no—yes, now they have her."

The topmast snapped like a carrot, and they could hear the cracking of her huge mainsail as she lay for a breathless moment in a trough of the sea. Three men were at the tiller, black figures in the moonlight, straining for life, and as Sir Rupert spoke the labouring ship veered slowly round on the other tack, and came gallanting towards the pierhead with the discomfited seas surging in her wake.

"These Hollanders are sea artists, there's no doubt of it," said the courtier.

"But she'll be crumpled up like paper, 'Hell's Welcome' yonder," cried one, pointing as he spoke at a line of rocks to leeward of the jetty.

A mist was over the place where the waters sobbed and spouted, and it seemed impossible that the galiot could ever veer round the pierhead into safety.

"The boats, the boats," screamed a woman; "if you're men you'll never let the poor creatures be drowned like this,—in the moonlight."

She shook her fist at the sea and sky and fell asobbing; but not a man stirred.

"A hawser from the pierhead might serve," said an old fisherman.

Sir Rupert was watching the galiot with straining eyes, but at these words he started and looked round him.

"Quick, quick, a rope," he cried.

"Sheer madness," said the old man.

But Bligh, taking no notice, had secured the end of a long line to his waist.

"Here, quick, fix this to a hawser," he cried, throwing them the coil.

And before they realised what he was about, he had started on his perilous journey.

"Shame on ye," cried the woman, "to let a stranger, and him a gentleman, show you your duty."

"Hush, goodwife," said a sour-visaged fellow, "the young man's town bred and a fool."

"Fool in your teeth, John Chalk; and that's better'n a coward."

"We shall have to have you on the cucking-stool, mistress."

"Cucking-stool, cucking-stool," she screamed, "and it's ye that ought to be in the stocks, John Chalk, for ye're idle, and ye're drunken, and ye're bad to your wife; all the world knows that, and ye're—but look, look, he'll be swept away and

drowned—so handsome, too, and in the flower of his days.”

Indeed, the task Sir Rupert had essayed was not a light one. The jetty was old and in disrepair, and though the first part, which was of stone, had resisted more or less successfully the ravages of time and weather, beyond this stood a low wooden structure, broken down in many places, and swept almost continuously by sea and spray. Here it was he first recognised the difficulty of the business, as drenched to the skin by scud and spindrift, and with fingers numbed to the bone, he was forced to drop on hands and knees before he could make the least headway. They shouted for him to return, but pride forbade, and there was something in the elemental strife that stirred him “as with a trumpet.” No Lydian London this, but the grimmest of worlds, with the old, old giants of suffering and death around him fit to make the stoutest shriek. The grey waters sobbed and sucked, and the seaweed streamed from the crazy baulks of timber beneath him; more than once he was all but swept away by some heavy sea that searched the pier from end to end, and when, half-way on his journey, he ventured to glance at the approaching ship, brave as he was he dared not look again. For the monstrous regiment of

waves appalled him, their leaden bulk as of chaos, malevolent in the moonlight. Why had he started on this wild adventure, this mad emprise? Was it courage, or *ennui*, or mere bravado, or was it that Azrael with opposeless finger was beckoning betimes? This last idea was daunting, ice to the heart, then consoling, stimulating even; better a wild end to a wild life and this Berserker rage to a silken bedroom. With clenched teeth and streaming hair, steadily he lessened the distance to his goal, clinging desperately with hands and knees when some wave broke over him, but on and on when it had swirled away, till finally bracing himself for a last effort, and taking advantage of a lull, he dashed along the short space that separated him from the pierhead, clambered up the crazy ladder, and clung to a bollard. The goal was won.

"Oh! the brave lad," cried the woman, "the handsome lad, gentle born every inch, and his hand as white as a lady's."

And their cheers reached him even in the turmoil around.

"But who is he, and where does he come from?" asked one.

"He was here by daylight this morning," said the innkeeper, "muddled from head to foot, and battering my door as if the very Dutch were here."

But he had the cleanest-legged roadster I have seen, and was very high and particular in things."

"If you ask me," observed a fisherman oracularly, "he knows more of that ship than we do. Look at her gaff mains'l and the size of it; she's a Hollander sure enough."

Meanwhile the adventurer having hauled in the slack of the hawser, passed it round the bollard and stood there, line in hand, waiting for a cast. Those on the galiot seeing his purpose gave her a point or two to larboard, steering for the pierhead as closely as they dared. On she came, the waters boiling beneath her bluff bows, and the following seas, higher and ever higher, as if fearing after all to miss their prey. The crew silent at their stations, the group on shore scarce breathing as they watched that tall, black figure in the moonlight still as a statue. On she came, nearer and nearer, and Sir Rupert could hear the champing of her blocks and see the white faces of her men; on, on, till at the top of a tremendous wave she surged abreast. Springing forward, he bent down and flung the line right amidships, where it was immediately seized, and the hawser hauled aboard with frantic haste. Meanwhile with the tiller hard a-starboard the ship swung round the end of the pier, but not before a great sea catching her

counter had crumpled up her poop bulwarks like so much tinderwood. The hawser tightened and tightened almost to the snapping point, but the way on the galiot was gradually checked, and slowly, very slowly, she swung round into the comparative calm water to leeward of the pier, slowly into safety.

A shout went up as Sir Rupert climbed down to the deck, and he was surrounded by men eager to shake his hand.

"Come, my friends, it is nothing; besides, though I spent a matter of two years in your country, for the life of me I could never get my poor tongue to wag in the language."

"Let me thank you then in the name of all," said one, stepping forward.

He was a man of about fifty—burly, substantial, and with clothes of a formal cut, somewhat too sedate and puritanical for Sir Rupert's fancy.

"You come to an inhospitable shore, sir."

"Inhospitable, indeed," returned the stranger.

And so saying he led the way to the cabin, a neat brown place beneath the poop, with dimity curtains to the stern windows and panelled bulkheads. Here was the skipper, with a bottle of Schiedam, his maturest, to point the occasion.

"He wishes me to say that he can never thank you enough," said the stranger.

The Hollander was all bows and smiles.

"It is his own seamanship he must thank, tell him."

"And that but for you we should have been lost."

Sir Rupert shrugged his shoulders.

"And he further wishes me to say," continued the stranger gravely, "that he lives near the Hague, where he owns a small farm, and that, notwithstanding the enmity existing between our two nations, he would always consider a visit from you the greatest honour imaginable."

Sir Rupert looked at him whimsically.

"Has the good Mynheer any English?" he asked.

"Not a single word, I believe."

"Well, you can tell him then that my personal regard for him is more than I can express, and that I wish him the longest of lives, and so on, and so on, but as for coming again to that vile sponge he calls his country—I'll see him—anyway, here's to his good health."

And he tossed his spirit off at a gulp.

It is to be believed that the stranger did not give an entirely literal translation to this last speech,

for the good skipper continued his compliments and smiles even after they had clambered down into the boat.

“I wonder that a baffle-headed ancient like that can manage his craft so masterly. What’s he saying now?”

“He says that we shall have a wet journey to the beach.”

Sir Rupert seated himself in the stern-sheets, and gave the order to shove off.

“These tedious old fools.”



CHAPTER III.

SOME PASSAGES AT AN INN.

THE "Galleons" was somewhat to the rearward of its youth, and many the winters' firelight that had danced upon its old black rafters, many the long tale told in the snug recesses of its chimney-corner. To the rearward, but comely in its age, mellow as the wines that slept in its dark cellars, with the apple tints of health upon the salt-kissed walls and its roof, a very triumph of the thatcher's art, good yet for many a year against the rain.

"For it's not mere wood and brick to me," said Mr Church, "it's a living thing with a history in every nook."

Sir Rupert Bligh had changed his clothes, and was seated in front of the fire listening complacently.

"Yes, my father was here before me and my grandfather before that, men of thrift that never

let the pottlepot get to windward of their reckonings."

"And your forebears to the very Deluge, I suppose."

Mr Christopher Church was in his element.

"No, my great-grandfather was something wild, I hear."

"Ah! that's better, these just people are a trifle—well, they have no story."

"He came from Friar's Toft way," said Mr Church, "and was with Hawkins in the '88."

"Drake and the Don, bonny fighters, but they have sailed away into the blue, my landlord—mere dream stuff now."

"Yes, they got a handsome drubbing by all accounts, those Spaniards."

Sir Rupert shrugged his shoulders.

"But your great-grandfather?"

"Well, the brush with the Spaniard over, he conceived so deep an enmity towards that nation—— But your rooms, sir, upstairs, are they to your liking?"

This last was addressed to the stranger from the ship who entered at that moment.

"Ah! yes, quite, but in any case I should not be disposed to be cavilling to-night."

"Come to the fire then, sir, and get some life

into you. I was just telling this gentleman here about my great-grandfather who was out in the '88,' and must needs thereafter sell his good acres to follow the Don to his own seas, Hispaniola way, but whether the extreme heat of those parts, which, as you know, is little better than the nether regions——"

"What should I know about the nether regions," laughed Sir Rupert.

"Doubtless your honour will."

"A hit, a hit; we must have you at the Duke's or with Davenant."

"Not I, no play-acting for me; but as I was saying, gentlemen, my great-grandfather, either from the extreme heat or from bad companions, fell into evil ways."

"Here's a health to him then," cried Sir Rupert.

"The *Espiritu Santo* was the name of the ship, with a company of broken men and rakehells, who did not confine their attentions entirely to the Spaniard."

"Pirates, in point of fact, my good landlord."

"No, not exactly, but——"

"Was 'no prey no pay' their maxim?" asked the stranger.

"My father never mentioned that."

"Well, such are the articles they sail under."

"You seem to have studied them, sir," said Sir Rupert.

"I have traded in those parts."

"And what were they like?" queried the landlord; "you may imagine I have an infinite curiosity."

The stranger drew his chair closer to the fire.

"You should thank Heaven, my good landlord, for this comfortable ingle-nook of yours, for believe me, in those solitary seas, there is something infinitely daunting in the sight of a distant sail."

"You have had *rencontres* then?" asked the courtier.

"A brush or two," replied the other.

Sir Rupert Bligh scanned him with more attention than he had hitherto bestowed.

"And gave a very good account of yourself as I should judge."

"We beat them off," returned the stranger gravely.

"I must hear of these adventures," said the landlord, rubbing his hands. "You see, gentlemen, though I am loath to say so, I have a kind of family interest in the matter. But supper, I had almost forgotten it. Betty, Betty——"

There was the sound of a shrill voice from the direction of the kitchen, scolding it would seem.

"Betty," cried Mr Church a second time, but hardly with so much aplomb as before, "Betty, my dear, these gentlemen want——"

He stopped abruptly; his lady was standing in the doorway and her attitude was decided.

"What is it?" she demanded.

"The supper, my dear, and—er—but I think I'd best see to matters, gentlemen."

And so saying he rose from his chair and left the room.

The expression on Sir Rupert's face was whimsical.

"*A vinculo matrimonii*," said he, "how goes the catch."

"But when I came, alas! to wive,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
By swaggering could I never thrive,
For the rain it raineth every day!"

It was not long before supper was served, sippets of bacon on a white dish as Sir Rupert had dreamed of, and both he and the stranger did justice to the meal. Sundry black-jacks of ale, moreover, added to their enjoyment—ale such as Mr Church only produced at christenings, junketings, penny-weddings, and the like signal occasions.

"Sir," said the courtier, "you must excuse my

freedom, but it is the most awkward thing in the world to be ignorant of a man's cognomen. In short, how may I call you?"

The stranger glanced at him sharply, and thought that he detected some inroads of the landlord's home-brewed.

"My name is Pentreith," said he, "Captain Pentreith. And yours?"

"Rycroft, sir, at your service, but a poor devil of a second son Rycroft, with just enough money to live idly, but not enough to do it with assurance."

"Then why no profession?"

"Profession. La, you there, what profession?"

"The Church, for instance."

"Ah, you make sport, I see. Tell me, do I look like a churchman?"

"No, I don't think you do," returned the other gravely, "yet there are other callings—the Law, let us say."

"Sir, I have a conscience."

"You are difficult to please, Mr Rycroft. What say you to Physic, then."

"Ah! there you have me on the hip, for I often dip into Fernelius on rainy days; but when it comes to turning out of a warm bed on a cold night for a fee, then I take it the Practice of Physic is no profession for a gentleman."

Here we were interrupted by the re-entrance of the landlord, accompanied by a tall spare man of about thirty, dressed in brown tabinet and wearing a periwig.

"Ah! here's friend Apothecary," cried Sir Rupert, "whose acquaintance I made this morning over a bruised shin-bone."

"I was glad to be of service," said the new-comer, "but it was more or less a chance after all, as I am only travelling in this neighbourhood in search of certain rare simples."

"Try London then," laughed the other, "there are plenty there."

Meanwhile the landlord had sat down in his especial chair in the chimney-corner with a sigh of relief.

"There's a deal to look after in a house like this," said he, "yet we manage to have a crack at times, and much good talk have I heard at this same fireside."

"Where our host," cried Sir Rupert, "our host, cunning man that he is, sits at his ease sucking in information like a spider."

"Aye, truly, your traveller, besides his reckoning, generally leaves some jest or tale behind him, which reminds me that this gentleman here has promised

to give me some particulars that may throw light on the history of my grandfather."

The stranger was gazing into the fire, his hands stretched to the blaze.

"There is little to tell," said he. "I traded in those seas for some time, and had one sharp passage with them. We had been becalmed in the Doldrums for over a month, with the ship as still as in a picture, and the stars fit to stare a man into madness. One of our crew we had to iron, the carpenter's mate, who had found his way to the lazarette and the rum."

"And how did you treat him?" asked the apothecary.

"With more rum, sir, *similia similibus curantur*."

"And when he died?"

"When he died it was in your seaman's fashion that we served him—a canvas jacket and a cannon-ball. But it comes to me even now o' nights, the way he shimmered into the green deep—like an aspen."

The landlord drew his chair closer to the fire.

"It's a fearsome thing, the sea," he exclaimed, "and no right dwelling-place for a man."

And they were all silent for a while.

"Day after day," continued the stranger, "with the sky like brass, night after night, with the pitiless stars, till we began to have some eerie fancies, and think that God was dead. One of the hands swore he could hear the carpenter's mate tapping at the bottom of the ship, and with a corposant flickering at the truck, not a man of them would go aloft. Worst of all, we could see by his trembling hands and bloodshot eyes that the captain also had found his way in secret to the rum puncheon. Nothing, I think, gentlemen, could have saved us from desperation and ourselves but the startling cry from the fo'castle head one evening—'Sail, ho!'"

"But how?" cried the landlord in astonishment.

"I cannot answer you, sir, the sea has its secrets, but certain is it there was not a waft of wind to stir a lady's hair. We leant over the bulwarks and stared at her, the whole ship's company, and I could see with my perspective glass that her hull and spars and shrouds were of an old-fashioned trim, as she hung there, clean-cut, black-barred against the sun. Then the men fell whispering amongst themselves. 'Look at the thickness of her mizzen,' said one, 'and the height of her poop and her lantern. Did ever a man see a poop like that since King Harry's days?' 'And the rake forrard,'

said another. You must remember we were rather shaken with our six weeks' stillness, and not a man of them but spoke beneath his breath, till the captain, who had been watching with the rest of us, suddenly cried out, 'By God, it's coming nearer, it's no human ship.' and ran aft to his cabin like a hunted thing."

Here the stranger paused, and Mr Church shifted uneasily in his chair.

"‘They that go down to the sea in ships,’ you know the passage, gentlemen, but it’s a gruesome place the sea. There was the *Adventure*, out of Portsmouth, that sailed in 1650; Captain John Porteous, with a crew of a hundred and eighty, but never a mother’s son of them ever rolled down the ‘Hard’ again; clean vanished, gentlemen. There was the *Little Secret*, of Plymouth, bound for the South Seas, and well named, for she hugged her secret, and never even a whisper heard. The *Golden Hind*, too, of Bristol, as stout a ship as was ever built; it was a summer’s Sunday evening when she sailed, and I can remember, as a boy, lying in the grass on the cliff listening to the bells and watching the last glint of sunlight on her t’gallant sails. And she was never seen after that, never spoken, a mere dream-ship, gentlemen—but I tire you."

"Not a whit, not a whit, sir," cried the apothecary.

cary; "you see, sir, when at home I am at the mercy of every puling infant, hysterical wench, or drunken toss-pot in the parish, yet I have my wild days when the sea calls."

The stranger glanced at him attentively.

"You have never travelled, then?"

"Never, save in the days of my nonage, when I learnt my craft as apprentice to old Surgeon Horniblow, of Lothbury, now with God. But I love to meet such an one as thyself, and travel in the second person, as it were, to the Islands of the Blest."

"Ah! my leech," cried Sir Rupert, "you also suck voyagers' brains, and must pay toll."

"Willingly, willingly," said the other. "I have a noble at hand gained squarely in the way of business, and with a mind to turn it into Burgundy. Here, drawer!"

"But your story, sir," said the landlord, after they had been provided.

"The captain to his cabin in this sort," the stranger went on, "we continued staring at the ship as she hung there like curious lacework against the sunset. 'He's right, she is coming nearer,' said the bo'sun quietly, and one of our company, an Irishman, fell to muttering Aves."

The landlord had let his pipe go out; the apothecary

cary was staring fixedly at the stranger; even Sir Rupert was interested.

“You see we were not as men quite in our right minds. The solitude had affected us, and to add to our discomforture we could hear the captain at his prayers, strangely intermingled with old songs, where learnt I know not, as thus—

‘Let’s sing a merry roundelay
For the soul of a sinner passed away,
A sinner ripe for hell was he
Hanged by the neck to the gallows-tree
At the four cross-roads.’

And the stranger sang in a low monotone very mournful. “You can imagine, gentlemen, how this strange humour of the captain affected us, and when the bo’sun suddenly burst out laughing we fairly gasped. ‘To think of it,’ he cried, ‘and me these twenty years at sea. Why, listen to the gurgling at our billage, we’re drifting, that’s all, and the other ship too, only faster.’ ‘But what’s that at her yardarm?’ said one in a sort of scared whisper. ‘Mary in Heaven, it’s a man hanged.’

‘The dead man’s hair is dank and wet,
His hands are clenched, his teeth are set.’

This from the captain’s room, gentlemen, and the Irishman fell again to his prayers.”

Here the stranger paused, and, filling a pipe from the landlord's box, sat smoking complacently.

"This same roguish tobacco," said he, "is mighty soothing, despite King James and his counter-blast."

"But the ship, sir, the ship."

"Ah, yes; well, the Irisher was at his Aves and the captain at his melancholy chantey, the while the ship kept drifting nearer and nearer. 'Surely that's a man's head there over the bulwarks,' said the old seaman, 'there by the after companion,' and as he spoke we could see the sorry figure of one, a mere anatomy, crawl painfully on to the poop and look toward us. Presently he pointed to his mouth. 'It's food or thirst, or both,' cried the boatswain. 'But that body at the yardarm,' said the old seaman. 'Wild work somewhere, mutiny perhaps,' returned the other, and there is no doubt, gentlemen, we were all very much relieved at this different posture of affairs. Mutiny was human at any rate, and so an end to our fantastic terrors. The boy stopped whimpering, and as for the Irisher, there was a period to his devotions, and devil a word of thanks to a saint in the calendar. I trust no one here is yet in the bonds of Rome.

"Not I," said the apothecary, and the others also shook their heads.

"True Protestants all, then. The twenty-five thousand saints quickly dispensed with, and our late stark condition changed to a feverish activity. We soon had a boat crunching alongside as smartly as a King's ship could have done the business. Provisions were passed down, and three or four kegs of the precious water. Thirst is a dreadful thing, gentlemen."

"It is," said the apothecary.

And the landlord also nodded his acquiescence.

"Meanwhile the captain, oblivious to the tramping on deck, still continued his eternal monody—

'The stars above, the snow below,
He's gone to where all sinners go,
His body wavers to and fro
At the four cross-roads.'

Chorus, gentlemen!"

There was something soothing in the stranger's song, the sound of the surf was in it, the wind in the trees and his listeners joined in with aplomb.

"What a weird companion it is," cried Sir Rupert.

"A most sweet evening," said the landlord, rubbing his hands.

"Our company was a large one, fifty-eight in all, and six men, the Irishers amongst them, were told off to the boat. The ship had now drifted to

within two cables' lengths of us, and the desolate figure at the yardarm gave a point to the captain's dirge. 'A poor way that to treat a fellow-creature,' said one. 'I feel a kind of shame upon me,' cried the bo'sun; and he voiced the thought of all. Nothing, as I have said, can be imagined more melancholy and deserted than the look of that ancient ship, with the green grass rank at her water line, and you may judge of our surprise, therefore, when we suddenly heard the short, sharp sound of a whistle. 'It's a decoy,' cried the old seaman, and even as he spoke the bulwarks were already alive with heads and the 'Jolly Roger' drooping from her main. Our boat pulled round with frantic haste, but it was too late, for a long gun was run out with incredible swiftness, and a round shot, most accurately placed, finished their business in this world. 'That's the Irishman gone,' cried one, 'and he owing me five pistoles.' You see, gentlemen, how savourless were all his prayers, and his saints, how vain."

There was a sombre look on the stranger's face as he sat gazing into the fire, and Sir Rupert eyed him with disfavour.

"Look you, sir, things have changed since you were last in England. Cromwell is dead and the

rolling of his drums and the trampling of his legions are heard only in hell now."

"Ah! those were days for men of action."

"But your story," said the landlord, scenting trouble.

"Well, as you may guess, sir, though peaceful traders we were not entirely unarmed, and our gunner, who had served against the Moors, accounted for their foremast in his first essay. We had four demi-culverins on board, besides sakers, and I promise you the dispute soon waxed hot. No civil warfare this, gentlemen, no chivalry of arms. 'Dead men don't bite,' frightful enough yet mighty stimulating, and it did one's heart good to see the way our fellows went about their business.

"A few broadsides exchanged, the rascals seeing it impossible to silence us, began to swarm into the boats. With savage outcries that were only half human, cursing and trampling one another in their eagerness to be at us, I would you could have seen them as they slid down the black sides of their ship. Indeed we were a likely prize, with many a silken bale and many a silver bar beneath the hatches; spices too, and rare herbs and pearls from the islands; 'tis no wonder their boats were nearly awash with the men that crowded into them.

Three crews to start with, they were soon reduced to two by our gunner with his demi-culverin—a pleasure to see the rascals drown—but two more shots failing of effect, it was not long before they were within the shelter of our counter and clambering through the stern windows. For the space of a few minutes, gentlemen, it was as lively a picture of hell as can be imagined. Yet there was a kind of joy in this Berserk rage, and I can well remember the look in one fellow's eyes as I caught him with my cutlass in the neck—here——”

He leant over and touched the apothecary, who winced something.

“But he gave me this for remembrance, this scar, and one knave more or less in the world, what does it matter?”

“Not a whit,” quoth Sir Rupert, “not a whit.” The stranger smoked placidly.

“You see the affair was all over in a few minutes, and I can assure you the decks were not pretty—but I think some one is wanting you, my landlord.”

A youth, breathless with haste and panic, was standing in the doorway.

“Is there an apothecary here? Master's took——”

“It's Mr Rutherford's lad,” cried the landlord.

“Yes, Master's took, he's dying.”

"I'll go," said the apothecary, "I may be of some use."

And so saying he drained his glass and hastily left the room.

"Who is this Simon Rutherford?" asked Sir Rupert with difficult carelessness.

"A solitary," returned the landlord, "one of Oliver's ruffians, a Quaker, a Fifth-Monarchy man, an Anabaptist for aught I know. But he keeps himself very privately, and in the round half-dozen years he's lived here I've only seen him twice!"

"And what manner of man, then?" asked the stranger.

"A gaunt, bony fellow he, with the harsh milk-souring face one would expect in so fanatical a rascal; but the gossips say he has the philosopher's stone and can turn old tin buckets into nobles."

"A man well worth preserving, then," laughed the other; "what say you, Mr Rycroft? and that reminds me that we have on board with us one Dr Prettyman, esteemed of extraordinary skill in the faculty. Perhaps our apothecary might like help."

"He won't," exclaimed the landlord; "they're devilish tetchy, I can tell you. I stopped our Dr Batson, that lives about ten miles from here, stopped him tampering with a spavined horse of

mine once, and he didn't speak to me for months. I see trouble."

"We can but try," returned the stranger, "and if you will send one of your lads up to the house, I will see what can be done with Dr Prettyman."

Left to himself, Sir Rupert sat long before the embers, musing on the adventures of the day.

"Now this fellow, this Pentreith, or whatever he calls himself, a formidable person surely, and tells a good tale—but I wonder which of those two ships he was really on."



CHAPTER IV.

CHILDE ROWLAND TO THE DARK TOWER CAME.

AND Simon Rutherford lay a-dying in his bed. Lo ! here a long voyage.

Comes it to all men this same adventure. Sometimes in the Third Act, sometimes in the Fifth, sometimes at the very zenith of our manhood, when the scent of the morning air is as wine, sometimes when the songs are ceased, the windows darkened, and 'the sound of the grinding is low.' But the Fact—well—the Fact itself is the supreme Fact, and one often wonders how these creatures can carry themselves so dauntlessly under the sun.

And Simon Rutherford lay a-dying in his bed. Lo ! here the last voyage.

Left by himself the old man had listened for a few minutes to the courtier's receding footsteps, then gathering his bags together

emerged from the cave and stood watching the sea. An angry war of the elements, uplifted crests, insensate surf, and he tried to understand what it was the tortured shingle kept screaming into his ear and the meaning of the skirling wind.

"The night is nipping," he murmured, "I am very cold."

The moon, patiently baffling with obscuring mists, looked coldly on the turmoil beneath, coldly on the sorrows of men.

"I am ill, I am old, I begin to understand."

And he shivered as he marked the white spent surf brabbling at his feet.

The pathway up the cliff was difficult, the way home toilsome, every step a burden—and he thought of the days when, with his cuirassiers, he could march a forty mile, of the days of bivouac and skirmish, of pike and gun and psalm and shock of battle, when their enemies were scattered as the chaff and the Lord of Hosts went vengeably before.

Reaching home at length he sank into his arm-chair with a sigh of relief.

"What! nephew; diligent I hope."

He passed his hands over his eyes in a dazed kind of way.

"Uncle, you are tired,—ill."

"It is nothing, a passing faintness, I shall be better soon."

He drank a little wine that the young man gave him.

"A passing faintness, a nothing, I am well now; 'twas the biting cold that overcame me. And you've kept the beech-coal fire at a dull red. So——"

"I have not left the room, uncle."

"'Tis a good lad, a good lad. But the wind is bitter cold to-night and wild, wild; tell me, nephew, what does it say?"

"Say, uncle, say—why, on summer days when I see the tall ships sailing by it whispers of sunlit islands and white surf on the sands, but to-night——"

"Ah! to-night, nephew, out at sea yonder—Dies iræ, dies iræ—O God! God! give me back the youth you've stolen, give me back my youth."

His face was white and the sweat stood out on the upper lip; never had Anthony known his guardian otherwise than self-restrained, grave, austere, and this sudden outburst struck him with pained astonishment.

"Uncle, you are tired, you want sleep."

But Simon Rutherford had risen from his chair and was peering into alembic and crucible.

"No, no, lad, leave me for a while, I am well enough, I have work to do—this must be distilled again—the time is short, insufferably short—short."

He swayed for a moment, then clutched at the air, and if Anthony had not rushed forward would have fallen prone upon the floor.

"Uncle! uncle!"

He shouted into his ear, but there was no answer; only a puffing of the cheeks as he breathed. Hastily loosening the neckband and putting a pillow under the head, he hurried to the kitchen, where he found the old serving-woman dozing over her knitting.

"Nan! Nan!"

She was deaf, and Anthony had to repeat himself more than once before he could awake her.

"What's to do, what's to do?"

"Your master's ill, where's Joe?"

"Joe, Joe; aye, a brave lad was Joe, and fond of me, sure. In his frieze coat of a Sunday how straight he was and fine."

Wrinkled, bent, dim-eyed, she herself had

been bonny once and made perchance many a heart now a-dust beat the faster.

"Your master's ill, Nan ; he's had a fit."

"Ill ! fit !" she muttered.

But gradually she came to understand.

"There now, mother, do you light a fire in his room, while Joe and I get him to bed. Where's Joe?"

"In the byre for sure," said she, "and there'll be hot bricks wanted and a posset and hippocras."

Women have a natural appetite for such occasions, and soon she was in the full tide of bustling activity.

Simon Rutherford got to his room and the lad sent to the village for help, Anthony sat down by the bedside with an aching sense of void. Different as were their ages, different as were their hopes and ambitions and outlook on the world, he loved the stern old man there dying, and thought of the loneliness to follow with a sense of dismay. Of his father and mother he retained not the slightest recollection, he had been sent at an early age to Ulchester Grammar School, and all his natural curiosity on the subject, his many questionings, had been invariably met with the reply that "It was not convenient that

he should know at the present time, but he might rest assured that he came of an ancient and honourable stock."

But now the old man lay a-dying on his bed, and though a rover from his youth, was bound on a longer voyage.

Anthony sat motionless, listening to the wind in the casements and watching the monstrous shadows of the firelight. He was sunk in the blackest of reveries, with the past a phantasmagoria before him—the future dark, menacing, sinister. Presently the measured breathing from the great four-poster ceased, and there came a deep sigh. Anthony drew the curtains hastily aside and found the sick man lying with his eyes wide open.

"Nephew, is that you, nephew?"

"Uncle, you are better."

"Where am I, what has happened, why am I in bed?"

"You fainted, uncle, that is all; you ought never to have gone out this evening, it was too boisterous and cold."

"But my arm, my right arm, and my leg, I cannot move them."

"You are numb from cold, uncle, I have had the fire kindled; you will be better soon."

"See, nephew, it is my sword hand." He spoke thickly, and the other had some ado to understand him.

"My sword hand. Ah! what is this at my throat?"

"Come, uncle, you must try and sleep, come now."

Old Simon Rutherford was silent for some time, breathing heavily, and his nephew, drawing the chair to the bedside, sat watching him. Again the old man opened his eyes and stared about him, but there was little of speculation in the look.

"To think that ever I should die like this, I that have lived rough and hard. Oh! if I could only hear the slatting of canvas again and the sea songs."

"Uncle, it is I, Anthony."

But the sick man was in a muttering delirium and took no notice.

"What do they know of things that have never been afield, what do they know of the horrors of the sea where God is not?"

He tried to rise on his elbow, and the sweat was on his face.

"There was Jim Monaghan and Batt, and no peace beyond the Line. But your dogs of

Spain, 'tis a work of grace—Look to the aludels, for your life, to the aludels and the register—Batt was wicked, worse than all, and the lad, blackmail, you say, well, a man must live—But the sea, how it talked, and the maddening prattle it made against the timbers o' nights."

"Uncle, don't you know me?"

The sick man continued his busy muttering, but Anthony though he bent his ear to listen could not distinguish all he said.

"Yes, yes, there was Jim Monaghan, a d——d Irisher, and the captain that rum put under hatches.

'No more the merry can he'll clink——'

How does it go—'tis many years now—Oh! yes—

'He's had his last, his gallows drink
At the four cross-roads.'

A lilting tune—but cohobate with your aqua regia and look to the mercury, there, quick—Yes, Jim Monaghan it was and Batt, wicked was Batt, but the sea, how it prattled against the timber, God! the things it whispered."

"Uncle, you must be quiet and go sleep, there now."

And he wiped the sweat from the dying man's forehead.

"'Tis hard to die and projection so near, so near—

' Let's sing a merry roundelay
For the soul of a sinner passed away.'

But what a ranting tune it was in those lazy tropic seas."

Anthony listened to his ravings with a sinking heart and watched him as he picked the air.

"Years ago it called me, the sea, what time I knelt in innocence, and still it is calling and whispering, calling! calling! calling!"

Here there was a knock at the door, followed by the entrance of the old housekeeper and the apothecary.

"I happened to be staying at the inn," said the latter, stepping forwards, "and thought, perhaps, I might be of service."

Anthony thanked him, and briefly explained what had happened.

The apothecary was looking his gravest, and the tavern content had quite given place to a more professional air.

"And how long ago was this?" he asked.

"About an hour," said Anthony.

“Has he been unconscious all the time?”

“No, he recovered a little, and knew me, but has been very rambling in his talk.”

The apothecary approached the bedside. “Ah! yes, yes—well, let us see,—yes, as I thought. Age and arteries, age and arteries. He has had what we call a stroke,—an apoplexy,—a leakage, as it were, young man. Phlebotomy is indicated, I think; yes, certainly phlebotomy. We must do what we can; but he is old, and there’s little hope, I’m afraid, little hope—*mors communis*—’tis the universal fate.”

And they stood listening for a while to the grumbling of the wind in the chimney and the remorseless ticking of the clock.

“This won’t do,” said the apothecary, producing his lancet. “You have a basin, good; now the arm, the basilic vein here, so, a few ounces will relieve strain—three or four shall we say; the pad now and the tape, good.”

The operation was performed with address, and the old man breathed more easily.

“Yes, yes—now let me see. Ah! right-sided paralysis. Eh! and the face too, somewhat—’tis bad, ’tis bad.”

He leant over and shouted into his ear, “Master Rutherford, Master Rutherford, do you know me?”

The sick man started a busy muttering, and the apothecary repeated his question.

"But do you know him?" whispered Anthony in astonishment.

"I—no—of course not, but what's this?"

He stepped back from the bedside with something of consternation, for the old man had struggled to his elbow, and was singing in a quavering voice—

"The stars above, the snow below,
He's gone to where all sinners go. . . ."

'Twas the very tune that had been ringing in his ears ever since he left the inn, and that he had been humming along the dark lane from the village.

"He has been raving like this," said the young man, "all manner of strange things. Is he at peace, I wonder?"

"'Purge me with hyssop . . . hide Thy face from my sins,'" moaned the dying man, as if in answer, "'keep me under the shadow of Thy wing . . .'"

"At peace," said the apothecary, "I wonder."

"How pleasant the flap of a mains'l on a summer's day. And the sea—how it talks at the forefoot."

He picked the bed-clothes with his left hand, and seemed to catch at feathers in the air.

The apothecary shook his head. "'Tis bad," said he.

"A tall ship and a hell; I wonder if any escaped."

"What is it you say, uncle—what ship? Well, Nan——"

This to the old serving-woman who was standing in the doorway breathless with asthma.

"There's a lad from the village—come to say—that a great London doctor's on the Hollander's ship—that was in this afternoon,—and if——"

"If what?" interrupted the apothecary.

"And if," she went on,—“if you don't know what to do, he'll——”

"Pish! who sent you on this fool's errand?"

"Fool's errand or no," she retorted, "he'll be here in a minute."

The apothecary was touched on the raw.

"What impertinence is this—some quack—some irregular practitioner—some pragmatrical rascal."—

"Did he give any name?" asked Anthony.

"Dr Prettyman's his name, and he must be at the gate by now."

"Prettyman! Prettyman! if it's Dr Prettyman of London, I can have no objection to a consultation."

Then the great man was announced—a venerable

figure, with his long white hair and beard, and his cloak red lined ; the ruffles spotless, the neckband a graceful fall, and in his hand he carried an ebony stick, surmounted by a small gold pomander box.

"What's here, what's to do?" he asked.

The apothecary was somewhat dashed at the abruptness.

"Dr Prettyman, I believe."

"The same."

"Of Queen Street, in London."

"Yes, yes."

"Our patient is, I fear, sir, past human aid," said the apothecary, "having, as I take it, a cerebral effusion, and a hemiplegia, but perhaps your judgment may——"

"Humph, yes, yes, and he has been wandering. So, mental, mental."

He leant over the bed and listened. The sick man was at his sing-song again.

"Phlebotomy, I see; yes, yes, nothing exhibited?"

"No, nothing whatever. The possibility of increased hæmorrhage I thought would——"

"Right, quite right, yes. Direct assaults on the house of life; no, no, and phlebotomy, not again."

"I did not propose," began the apothecary, but the great man stared him down.

“Yes, yes, the pulse, humph, I must tell you plainly there is little hope. And you——”

He turned sharply round on Anthony.

“I am his nephew.”

“There is little hope, I say, yet—I have known cases—it is just possible I might revive him.”

“If you could, sir; if only——”

“Possible, mind, not probable, a last chance, but I must have quiet.”

“We will leave the room, then,” cried Anthony eagerly.

But the apothecary did not move. “I shall be able to assist you,” he suggested.

“Not a whit, not a whit,” said the great man, and the other was forced to comply.

Left alone Captain Pentreith locked the door; then taking off his long white beard and wig, sat down by the bedside.

“This storm, this sou’-wester, somewhat boisterously, perhaps, hath blown me—well, I think I play the wise physician to a nicety.”

He watched the dying man for some time in silence.

“To think of it—these years—and to find him by a lucky chance,—not much changed either, save for a puritanic look. Now, I wonder——”

He went to the door and peered out, but the

place was quite silent ; then he crept back to the bedside and shouted in the other's ear—

“Ayscough, Ayscough.”

There was no response.

“Starboard, damn you, starboard.”

The sick man opened his eyes and stared about. Then there came a look of intelligence, recognition, finally terror.

“So it's home at last, Master Ayscough, and a merry roundelay it is——”

He had brought his face quite close to that of the dying man, who lifted up his arm as if to avoid a blow.

“A merry roundelay. Eh ! But, quick, listen, where are they ?”

The old man's lips moved for a moment. “I,—I——”

“Damn you, where are the—the papers ?”

But the eyes closed, the hand fell gradually to the side ; the heavy breathing recommenced.

“Too late, too late, and yet——”

There was a shuffling of feet outside, and the stranger, hastily resuming his disguise opened the door.

“We thought we heard you call,” said the young man.

“I—no ; but I am sorry to say my experiment

has failed. I can do no more; there is no hope."

And so saying he bowed gravely, and took his leave.

Yet another hour ere Death stepped softly to the curtains, the young man watching the while with ashen lips, the old wife sitting by the bedside crooning and muttering in the manner of the aged.



CHAPTER V.

THE SEALED PACKET.

FATE had dealt kindly with Master Applegate, the lawyer, in that it had given him a sound mind, a sound body, and a competent fortune. For the first he was indebted to his parents, for the second to an even and sober life, for the third to a shrewd wit that had served him excellently well during the Civil War. Honest withal, or as honest as a man may be during the days of pike and caliver, he had succeeded in retaining the respect of both sides, while holding strictly aloof from the excesses of either. For the rest, a neat personable man that now stood with his back to the fire regarding young Rutherford with a look of mingled interest and compassion.

The funeral had taken place that morning. A bleak day, with a scatter of snow on the ground, and marshalling clouds in the West promising con-

tinuance "Of few days and full of trouble." The winter's light fell dully on the brasses and the worm-eaten pews and the effigies of knights long gone. Lo! here an end to all the marches and fights and schemes and hopes—all the multifarious activities of that stark thing under the pall there. Sheer imbecility to young Rutherford in his heady youth—this Death—a pitiful anti-climax.

The lawyer was the first to break the silence.

"You look tired, my lad, and ill."

"I cannot get the church out of my mind," said Anthony, "so grey it seemed and dank, and the sleepers there so pitiful. This Death—bald, fearful, impertinent—do you know what it is, Master Applegate?"

"Eh! what?"

"I cannot understand it."

"Don't try to," said the lawyer, "many a fine skull's been burst in that attempt." He stirred the logs to a blaze, and the firelight threw into relief the oaken panels and the portraits on the walls.

"Look you," said he, "that fellow up there blinking at us—one of Elizabeth's sea-captains, and a stout rascal by all accounts. Yet he's quiet enough now over in the churchyard yonder, and the roar of a fleet's broadside could not break his rest."

The young man sat glooming into the fire, while the lawyer, sipping his wine, considered with Olympian aloofness the fragility of things. Presently they were interrupted by the entrance of the old serving-woman with the candles. She was dressed in black bombazette befitting the occasion, and not a little proud thereof; even in our nodding acquaintanceships with death the decencies must be observed.

“Candles, eh! Come, come, this won’t do, what’s o’clock?”

Mr Applegate drew his chair up squarely to the table, and taking some papers from his bag began to arrange them before him. The lawyer now, precise and formal, and business is business despite Death and its ill-considered blunderings.

“You must understand, Anthony,” he began, “that, although we have all the documents that are necessary, your uncle by no means entrusted me with the whole of his affairs. He was a secret and a private man, and our acquaintanceship dates no further back than May 27th last, when he came to me with the request that I should draw up his will. It was the first time I had ever seen him, and, though of course I could not be entirely ignorant of the loose and idle gossip of the village, I must confess that our interview filled me with

some surprise. It was not the will—that is clear enough,—but the manner of the man that struck me as notable and strange. A sectary, yes, of some wild Fifth-Monarchy sort; but more than that, and underlying that, a kind of dread and fierceness in his eyes—a daunting look.”

He paused a moment, untying some papers.

“Had your uncle anything on his mind?” he asked suddenly.

“I don’t know,” returned the other.

“The will is here,” said the lawyer, “and bears the date May 27, 1664. As short and simple a document as one could wish. Listen! ‘This is the last will and testament of me, Simon Rutherford, of Wrenford, in the County of Cornwall. I devise and bequeath all my estate and effects which I may die possessed of or entitled to, to the young man living with me known as Anthony Rutherford absolutely. I appoint John Applegate, solicitor of Wrenford, in the county of Cornwall, as my sole executor.’ This is duly attested by Benjamin Tilly and Jonas Poselthwaite, the first my gardener, the second my clerk. And now permit me to congratulate you.”

He rose from his chair, took up his glass of wine, and bowed.

"You are heir to a considerable fortune, young man, and many a blade who ruffles it now in London would gladly forswear his dicing and drinking for a tenth of it. Again allow me to congratulate you."

They shook hands, and, the glasses emptied, the ceremony came to an end.

"And now," continued the lawyer, resuming his seat and formality at the same moment, "we come to one or two other things that are not quite so clear, and, in the first place, you will note that no relationship is mentioned between you, in fact, I'm not sure that there is any relationship."

"I half suspected that," said Anthony.

"Why?"

"Because I seem to remember other faces when I was a child, and a town and streets. But if not a relative, who am I then?"

"I don't know."

"He told you nothing?"

"Nothing."

There was silence between them for a space, unbroken save for the ticking of the clock.

"And what did my client mean," said the lawyer at length,— "what did my client mean by saying there might after all be no occasion for a will?"

“There may be a later one.”

“No, ‘a’ will, ‘any’ will.”

Anthony considered a moment.

“He was in search of the Philosopher’s Stone, you know, and, though it may seem far-fetched, perhaps that may account——”

“Ah! I heard as much from my housekeeper, a notable gossiping woman, with her wild tales of pack-horses coming down the road o’ nights laden with ingots made out of old andirons. What——

‘Your sal, your sulphur, and your mercury,
Your oil of height, your tree of life,
Your blood,
And worlds of other strange ingredients,
Would burst a man to name.’

I saw the play, more years ago than I like to think of now, with Jonson himself there girding at an ill-played Subtle, as I remember.”

“He thought to have projection in a week,” said Anthony, “and then——”

“Ah! I see it all now, once projection, then that other fabled ichor that keeps men’s blood from thickening and their veins from growing old. The Elixir of Life, eh! and this the haunting look towards interminable years. No death, no will. But what a strange madness.”

"He spent days and nights in his room there; I used to help him."

"A strange fantasy. Immortal among mortals. To see the generations rise and fall, he alone remaining. 'Twere a questionable gift."

"He spoke to me about it, but only once."

"A dreadful gift, when youth would pall and the very breath of April be anathema."

And both were silent awhile, thinking of the grey church and the dead man and his hopes a-dust.

"'Tis a queer world," exclaimed Mr Applegate at length, "and save in matters of law no sense in it that I can see. A most unaccountable business."

He sipped his wine musingly.

"Your uncle, where did he get his money from?"

Anthony was gazing at the glowing logs and their castles in Spain. The lawyer repeated his question.

"My uncle, my guardian I mean, never mentioned his affairs to me."

Mr Applegate sniffed.

"Nor to me either. However, the money is safe enough in Lombard Street and elsewhere. I have a list."

He selected one of his papers and began reading with comments.

“With the East Indian adventurers, various sums amounting to £10,800—a shrewd investment; the Levant merchants £3000, the Portugal trade £4800—both sound and steady; Candian wines £300—decaying, I think. What’s this? Loans to New England planters £3400—I should advise a change here, the canting rascals will never thrive. The next is better, two copyholds in Shoreditch, another in Moorfields, some roods of land in Bednall Green—the town is sure to grow.”

The lawyer rubbed his hands, while Anthony listened in a dreamy kind of way. He was very young.

“Yes, land is safe, nobody can run away with it; and, if I were you, I should do something more in this direction. What’s this? The New River—good in its way, and this, a loan to the Duke of Buckingham through the Goldsmiths—humph, that sounds— Ah! well, a new way to pay old debts I suppose, and Parliament will have to smoke for it. A long list here, and the eggs in different baskets. Your uncle was shrewd, young man.”

Mr Applegate enjoyed a mental satisfaction in contemplating money, even in the abstract.

‘A fine fortune,” said he; “but where the deuce did it all come from?”

The fire had burned dim again; Anthony threw on another log, and his face was troubled.

“This money—is it clean?”

“Why do you ask?”

“Because my guardian on his death-bed, in his ravings, talked of having been abroad, and as if something, I know not what, were on his mind.”

“Has he been abroad in your time?”

“Never, as far as I know.”

The money was there, nobody had accused the dead man, and Mr Applegate was quite beyond the quixotry of youth.

“You must remember,” said he, “that we have passed through troubled times, when ancient families decay and new ones rise. Your uncle was a hot Commonwealth man, higher perhaps in Cromwell’s councils than we think, and under these circumstances his chances of acquiring wealth by sequestration and so forth would be great.”

“But honestly?”

“I see no reason to doubt it.”

“But he talked about the sea as if—as if——”

“As if what?”

“As if there had been wild work somewhere.”

“In his ravings, you mean.”

"Yes."

The lawyer rose from his seat and put his hand on Anthony's shoulder.

"Come now, what a coil is here about a sick man's fantasy. Surely those he had wronged would have come forward when the tide turned, had his gear been got by unfair dealing."

"So you think I have a right to this money?"

"Of course, my dear lad, of course."

"Forgive me for teasing you," said Anthony, "but I have been solitary and morbid of late."

"Well, well, we'll consider that as settled, then, eh? Now here is another packet your guardian entrusted to me, with strict injunctions that it should not be opened save in the event of his death, and then only by you."

Anthony turned it over with a feeling akin to fear, this message from the dead. It was carefully sewn in oiled parchment, presumably as a protection against damp, and was addressed "To my dear ward, Anthony Rutherford. To be opened in case I should at any time die, and by no other person." This last in red ink and underlined.

"'In case I should at any time die,'" mused the lawyer—"the Elixir again."

"Will—will you open it?"

"No, no, we must respect his wishes."

The young man fingered it with a kind of horror. This toil and scheming, this stubborn work. Glorious youth, gallant manhood, damnable decay. 'Twas a pitiable business. He broke the seal and read, hastily at first, the second time with more deliberation.

"I think it's working up for more snow," said the lawyer, who was standing at the window, his eyes on the darkening moor.

"I want your advice, Mr Applegate. I cannot understand what it means."

"Is it private?"

"No, I don't think so."

The lawyer strolled to the fireplace and put his hands beneath his coat tails.

"I leave it to you," said he.

Anthony paused a moment, then cleared his throat.

"It seems to have been written in haste; here it is: 'To my beloved ward, Anthony Rutherford. When you read this I shall be dead, and must leave it to you how to act.—I dared not have them near me for many reasons.—When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness—perhaps they had better lie there and rot—hawks are abroad—and yet——' There is a kind of map

here, but that is all the writing there is. Now what do you make of it?"

The lawyer examined the papers minutely.

"Yes, evidently in haste," said he at length, "and under the influence of some strong emotion, as I should judge. But what's this, London 10½ miles. Has he been to London lately?"

"Not that I know of, not even to the village since he saw you."

"This map is evidently the clue to where something is hidden, something he considered important—documents probably."

"But what documents?"

"Well, from the tenor of his life these last years I should say they related to the Philosopher's Stone, or the Elixir of Life, or some such chimera."

"Perhaps they might explain my guardian's fortune."

"Not a bit of it," said the lawyer.

Anthony paced up and down the room for some moments.

"What do you advise me to do?" he asked.

"Do nothing,—this is no solid business; take his half advice in the letter there, and let them 'lie and rot.'"

"So you think——"

"I think, nay I'm sure, that your guardian made his money in a fair way of business, and that there's nothing to worry about. But what's this, eight o'clock? Bless me! I must be going, else what will my housekeeper say."

Mr Applegate gone, Anthony sat down by the fireside to his castles again. Fantastic towers, bright with the morning sun; dewy glades, visions of faery; battlements, sombre as a winter's tale. And there were houses in the coals, and twisted chimney stacks and gilded vanes, for London called. And there were domes and steeples, and streets and shops, and crowds ever changing, and London called. Youth and the threshold of life, the stage with the shadowy actors. And above, the grey-eyed Fates.

The logs changed from white to red, from red to ash, and still he sat there, quiet as a stone. How solitary the house, how lonely; scarcely had he realised till then how much he missed the dead man's footsteps. Then a curious humour possessed him, a wish to rehabilitate past scenes, and taking a candle he ascended the narrow stairs that led to the laboratory. The place had been locked ever since the night that Simon Rutherford died, and had a close and chemic smell. Crucible and retort, their secrets safe; the table

with its open Bible, the chair half pushed aside, the ashes in the grate; what an eloquence in all these furnishings! He stood there awhile, listening to the sougling of the pines, bleak desolation in his heart. A mist, a vapour, a weaver's shuttle, a flower of the field, a watch in the night—all the imagery wherewith poor man has vainly tried to realise his frailty were swallowed up in the one tremendous fact that Simon Rutherford would neither work nor read nor pray nor dream there—any more—for ever.



CHAPTER VI.

THE WHITE ROAD TO LONDON.

THE scent of the morning air was sweet, the meadows on either hand sparkled in the sun, and his pulses were a-dancing with the joy of life the day that Anthony took the road. For it is good to be young and it is good to be strong, and it is good to be twenty-three and on a journey with the clean blue sky above and the good brown earth beneath.

How familiar the road at the commencement. Farmer Rigby's orchard, that he had so often robbed, with the traitor gap in the hedge that gave him ingress, there as of old. Farmer Rigby himself, too, leaning over the gate and with a croaking "Good day," but aged now and bent and white, and by no means the Farmer Rigby, the terror of the youthful malefactor. Past the old duck pond, frozen this morning save at the farther end where

the spring came up and where it was of such a depth, so ran the legend, that the wit of man had as yet devised no means of fathoming it; the old duck pond where he had so often sailed his tiny argosies and on whose shining face he had ventured a-voyaging one summer afternoon in a sheep-trough, the admiration of all beholders. Past the old church with its ancient walls, sun-kissed, and the rooks cawing about its tower, lazy sweet music in the morning air; past forty-foot gap and the upland glebe with the idle plough left in its last furrow; past the rude cross by the wayside, lichen-covered, Anthony at length surmounted the long ascent that led to the open down and the view of the sea.

The village, with the smoke curling from the chimney stacks and the thatched houses half hidden by trees, lay there in its hollow of the hills. Beyond it the sea, a pageant in pearl and grey and azure, with far away to the westward the sails of a "first-rate," fairylike in sunshine. There by the jetty swung the fisher-boats, in which he had so often played; there stretched the sands, surf-edged, where he had raced in childhood, the scent of seaweed in his nostrils, the singing of wind in his ears; and there in the church below him slept his guardian, untroubled now by night alarm or

roll of drum, his toils and studies over, his *amende honorable* to God complete. Anthony turned from it all with a poignant regret, for here was an end to the First Act.

All that morning he pursued his journey at an even pace. The downs passed, there ensued a tract of partly cultivated country, commons fit only for gorse and sheep alternating with patches of shallow soil and spindle crops. These, as he gradually descended into a broad valley, were succeeded by enclosed fields of a more prosperous aspect, where hedgerows, sheltered from the upward winds, grew thick and high, and homesteads nestled close amidst their elms and haystacks.

"Is there any place a few miles farther on where I am like to come by a lodging for the night?" he inquired of the landlord of a little roadside inn where he had sat down to rest.

"That'll be near the moor," returned the other, "and there's no place that I know of till you come to the 'Plough and Sail,' many a mile, but there's Thornton's Folly over against the peat-moss, something out of the main road as you bear to the right."

"Is that a farm? Can I get a bed there?"

"I daresay you might, for Thornton himself, though none too neighbourly, is a lone man and a

solitary, and mayhap a stranger would get welcome and a bit supper."

Undaunted by these vague directions and promise of a somewhat limited hospitality, Anthony shouldered his pack and resumed his journey. The road, passing for some miles through level cultivated country, again began to ascend, and with signs of occupation less and less as it rose on to the moor. After walking steadily for three hours, he began to cast about him for the promised shelter, but no sign of Thornton's folly or Thornton's wisdom was anywhere to be seen.

"Over against the peat-moss—something out of the main road as you bear to the right."

Anthony had repeated his directions till he was word perfect, but here it was all peat-moss, and something out of the main road would have led him into something very like a quagmire. Venturous enough for a stranger at the best of times, staring daylight, but with the dusk already upon him, madness itself. He sat down by the wayside to consider. The short winter day was drawing to its end and the tawny West fast fading into night; nothing but the dim upland was around him, and the only sound the whipping of wind in the rushes. Anthony did not relish the situation, and had even thoughts of turning back, but there was

something of cowardice in the notion, and, besides, the comforts of the "Plough and Sail" might not be so far away as the innkeeper had led him to suppose. Yet what weary work it was now, with the loose stones jarring his feet at every step and the interminable road stretching before him like a white ribbon in the starlight. To crown all, he had barely advanced a league when the way divided, an even Y, and with no indication as to which was main, which tributary.

Anthony stood dumbfounded, beating his hands together, for the night had fallen nippingly and the keen air bit to his very marrow.

"I suppose I must toss for it. King to the right, shield to the left—King, eh? Well, so be it."

And he resumed his journey with a sinking heart till suddenly the sight of a shepherd's hut some half a mile farther on his road seemed to justify the spinning of the coin. A mere shanty by the wayside, built of rough stones such as the moor afforded, and roofed over with planks and turf.

Yet never did lodging come more seasonably. The place was empty, but the smouldering remains of a peat fire showed that it had not been out of occupancy long, and that some herdsman had been

keeping there a lonely watch. Anthony's spirits rose as he blew the embers to a glow, and to add to his satisfaction there was a good store of dry hay in the place. With these comforts and the provisions at command he could defy the cold, so latching the door he sat down by the fire and commenced in earnest on his bread and meat. Old saws, trite classic maxims of "Hunger the best sauce," learnt long since at Ulchester, rose to his mind, and as he stretched himself to the genial warmth, Anthony felt that he had never been so comfortable in his life. Even the aching in the limbs, the throbbing in the feet, intolerable an hour since, were now but pleasing pains, and when at length he lay down upon his soft sweet bed of hay he enjoyed to the uttermost the exquisite languor of fatigue. For it is good to be young and it is good to be strong, and it is good to be twenty-three and on a journey with the clean blue sky above and the earth beneath.

But the night's rest was not destined to pass undisturbed, for barely had he been asleep two hours when he was suddenly reawakened to consciousness by a cold draught of air in his face. The door was slightly open, and the blood rushed to his face as he thought he saw a shadow there.

"Who's that?" he cried.

And even as he spoke the door shut again with a sharp click of the latch. Anthony jumped up, but stumbling across a bundle of hay, by the time he had recovered himself and gained the outside of the hut nothing was to be seen over the dim brown face of the moor, not a sound to be heard save the melancholy wind in the bent.

“A dream,” thought he, “and yet——”

He thrust his sword into some low furze bushes, then smiled at the folly: they would hardly have given covert to a hare.

“A dream, only a dream.”

And yet he felt uneasy. Wild elfin tales of his childhood came to mind when best they could be spared. Tales told by the fireside on nights of high wind, and made yet the more impressive by the solitariness of his early days and a mind more than usually imaginative. Old gammer’s tales of sprites and goblins, the man in the oak, the hell-wain, the firedrake, and—

“Airy tongues that syllable men’s names
On shores, in desert sands and wildernesses.”

Now on the moorland, enhanced by night and silence, these fantastic stories came back with added terrors. The sighing in the rushes, the unexpected turning of a leaf were matters of suspicion, while

mounds and tors and naked rocks took to themselves unusual and monstrous shapes. One object in especial, a hillock or barrow, arrested his attention. It stood about a hundred yards behind the hut, forming part of the skyline, but whether artificial or belonging to the natural contour of the ground could not be determined in the uncertain light. Some grave of a forgotten chieftain, perhaps, some altar, built to an unknown god by a vanished race; but whatever its original purpose, Anthony felt that the eeriness of place and circumstance were fast unmanning him, and that he could never rest until satisfied that no one lurked there.

“My courage to give way like this,” thought he, “and at the first brush; but I’ll see this business to an end.”

A thin mist was creeping up from the west, blotting out companionable stars, and the cold enwrapped him like a cloak. The silence was unbroken, save for a sound, not of the wind as he thought, but of gentle breathing, as if the very earth suspired. A sense of mystery, of danger, intangible evil oppressed him, and much ado he had to crush the rising panic.

“But we’ll chance the hobgoblins,” he muttered, “and as for that mound there, I’ll just satisfy

myself as to that, and then—why then to sleep again.

Anthony was no stranger to moorland dangers. Thexton waste, a notable morass, lay not a mile from his old home. An awesome place, with its treacherous moss and black pools and terrifying story. Nan's tales for the most part, and nothing lost in the telling; of missing men gone to their account; of travellers lured by marshlights, choking their life out under the stars; of murdered men hidden there for ever by the senseless slime.

"The devil take her winter's tales," thought he, half inclined to abandon his purpose.

Yet pride kept him to an adventure which in any case would have been hazardous. For the ground was marish and quaking, tufts of coarse bent and clumps of moss alternating with stagnant pools. Anthony had to test every step of the journey, and more than once he sank to his ankle. To add to his difficulties the mist, with its gigantic feelers throwing out along the valleys, made everything shadowy and vast and vague.

"The deuce take it, the hillock itself is hidden now."

Uncertain how to act, he groped blindly forward a few more paces, till suddenly, a false step, and he sank knee-deep into the mud. For a moment his

heart stood still with terror, and then catching hold of some tough grass he managed by a supreme effort to regain the solid ground.

"This will never do," he gasped. "I must keep the road."

But his peril had been so imminent, and the agony of mind he had undergone the last few moments so great, that it was some time before he could summon up sufficient resolution to retrace his steps.

It was now, as he judged, not much more than seven o'clock, and he determined at all hazards to resume his journey. The rest, short though it had been, had refreshed him, and fortunately the road, though rough and in many places little better than a cart-track, was marked on either side by occasional posts. Anthony had great hopes that it would not be very long before he saw the welcoming lights in the distance.


"And if wishing could bring them," thought he, with a sigh.

But his troubles were far from being at an end, for great masses of cloud, gathering from the north, were rapidly overspreading the sky, and soon, to his dismay, the snow began falling, faster and ever faster. Before him the road, never ending, as it seemed, and he began to wonder if fate had doomed

him to a houseless night. To turn back was as hopeless as to advance, for the landscape was rapidly whitening, and the road becoming indistinguishable from the moor. To crown all, the keen air cut him to the quick, and the tortured flakes blinded him as he plodded doggedly on.

"The inn cannot be far away now; I must see the lights soon."

But every moment made matters worse, and the weight of wind brought him at times almost to a standstill. The night had been closed in like an inky pall, he could barely see an arm's length before him, till finally, missing his footing, he stepped into a snowdrift by the wayside and fell heavily to the ground.



CHAPTER VII.

WHICH TREATS OF A RESCUE AND A BALLAD.

A SOUND as of ringing of bells, a confused babble of voices, and Anthony felt as if he were ascending from the depths of the sea. Then a dim perception, indefinite wonder, semi-consciousness, till finally he opened his eyes and vaguely remembered all that had passed. Half buried in drift, and huddled against some kind of post, one arm was bent beneath him and his feet and hands were quite benumbed with cold. Snow was still falling, though not so heavily; the wind, though still moaning from time to time in hollow blasts across the moor, was much abated, and he began to think that he might have been lying there for some hours.

But a feeling of quiescence possessed him, delicious lassitude, and though he knew full well what

this meant on such a night and in such a place, he would hardly have been aroused from the overpowering lethargy had it not been for a strange sound that raised his curiosity. A creaking sound, harsh and strident during the gusts of wind, dying down almost to silence in the lulls, it was comparable only to the swinging of a half-hinged door or the rusty signboard of an inn. He stretched his arms out in all directions in the blackness, but felt nothing; he tried to raise himself into a sitting posture, but could not, till at length the sound ceasing entirely he gave up any further effort, and sank back into unconsciousness again.

"You are better now?"

Anthony opened his eyes.

"What is it? Who are you?"

A girl was kneeling in the snow chafing his hand. On the ground by her side stood a stable lantern, whose feeble glimmer seemed only to intensify the darkness around.

"How long have you been here?" she asked.

"Hours, I think. I have lost my way. But what is that noise?"

"Never mind now," said she gently, "there is help at hand, and the house is only a little way from here, down in the hollow yonder."

"What, the 'Plough and Sail'?"

"No, no, it's not an inn. But do you think you can walk?"

Anthony made a desperate effort to move, but could not.

"I think my legs are benumbed," said he faintly.

"Never mind, I will leave the lantern here and run for help. I shall not be long."

But at that moment they heard the crunch of footsteps at no great distance and a manly voice trolling a song—

"The stars above, the snow below,
He's gone to where all sinners go,
His body wavers to and fro
At the four cross-roads."

Anthony listened as one in amaze.

"The same song," thought he, "the same lilt."

"Heigh-ho! What's this?"

"It's Mr Rycroft," she cried joyfully, "we shall be able to get you home now."

And at that moment a figure emerged into the circle of light.

"Miss Pentreith, you here?"

"Come, quick! He's been lying like this for hours—he cannot stand—we must get him home."

Sir Rupert Bligh worked with a will, and after

about five minutes of rubbing and kneading Anthony began to feel a genial glow spread through his limbs.

"I think I can stand now," said he.

But at that moment a strong gust swept over the moor and something lightly touched his hair. So cold it was, the thing he grasped—a human foot.

"Let me help you," said Sir Rupert.

Anthony had struggled to his feet, overcome with horror, for there stood a gibbet by the roadside and a man hanging in chains. So pitiful it looked, so lonely, so anathema, in the candlelight.

"And that was a fellow-creature once," said Sir Rupert, "but a great villain, as I hear."

"How?"

"He was starving, they say, and netted two hares one night, crown lands, too; surely such knaves deserve to hang. But they've seen to it that he'll never hunger more, so we'll leave the poor devil to the stars."

Anthony's limbs were so deadened that he could only shuffle along at a slow pace, and had it not been for the support of his companions he would hardly have been able to have stood upright. But the resilience of youth, aided by a strong constitution, soon reasserted itself, and after the first quarter of a mile had been traversed he began to feel himself again. By this time great masses of cloud

were shepherding to the south, leaving behind them unsmirched night, and gradually the outline of the road and the white stretch of moor became distinct. But sign of any house there was none.

"I hope you won't think it rude of me," said Anthony, after they had been walking for some time in silence, "but to whom am I indebted for my rescue?"

"This is Miss Pentreith, the daughter of your host, and——"

"It was only quite a chance," she interrupted. "I came along the road to see if I could meet my father, and by good hap found you lying there."

Anthony noticed how sweet her voice was,—pleasant to the ear.

"Your father went towards Culham, Miss Pentreith, he must be home by now—but who is this?"

The bent figure of a woman was approaching along the road, and she passed them without even glancing up.

"It is his mother," whispered the girl, "she goes there every night."

Yet a little while they stopped to look back at the distant gibbet and its travesty, black against the sky. And they could see that the mother was fondling the dead hand.

"Was there no other way but that?" said Sir Rupert in a kind of anger.

An unexpected dip in the road and Anthony saw quite close to them a small house half hidden in a grove of wind-bent oak. The red light from a blind streamed hospitably across the snow, and his satisfaction was complete when he found himself situated before the crackling logs of a fire.

"Has my father come back?" asked the girl.

"No, mistress," answered a harsh-featured man who was laying supper.

"It is late, I hope nothing——"

"He told me not to expect him before ten," said the other.

"Ah! well, do you see to things in the kitchen, I will finish here."

Anthony watched her as she moved about the room, so deft in gesture, so quiet, with her grey dress and Flemish lace about the neck and fair hair, goodly to look at, as he thought. Presently their eyes met.

"I cannot thank you sufficiently," said he hastily, "for my life in the first place, and now—this kindness."

She was about to reply, when voices were heard

outside, and Captain Pentreith entered, followed by Sir Rupert Bligh.

Father and daughter greeted with a grave tenderness.

"Mr Rycroft tells me that you have had an adventure," said he.

Whereupon she gave a brief account of the occurrence, her father glancing the while inquiringly at Anthony.

"And we have the privilege of serving——?"

Anthony hesitated, for the lawyer had been exigent as to the necessity for secrecy and the danger of chance acquaintance. Indeed Mr Applegate had done his best to dissuade him from the journey altogether, but finding the young man's mind quite fixed on London, had urged him in any case to have the papers sent by sea.

"I don't suppose I shall trouble about them much," Anthony had said.

"But it's best to be on the safe side, and if I were you I should make the journey on foot and as plainly dressed as possible."

"And whom have we the privilege of serving?"

Anthony started at the repetition of the question.

"Rutherford is my name, Anthony Rutherford."

But there was a close scrutiny in his host's look that gave him a feeling of uneasiness, and yet how

could he be churlish under the circumstances, and what guile could be behind the girl's fair face and honest eyes?"

"You are travelling to London, then, I presume," inquired Captain Pentreith.

Anthony answered in the affirmative.

"You will excuse my curiosity," said the other, leaning forward, "but I fancy I am addressing the nephew of Mr Simon Rutherford, of Wrenford, lately deceased."

"Did you know him, then?" cried Anthony in astonishment.

"No, but I heard of him from the landlord at the 'Galleons.' You must know," he added by way of explanation, "my daughter and I were passengers on the Dutch galiot that would have been wrecked but for the gallantry of our friend here."

"It was the talk of the village," said Anthony.

"So after staying at Wrenford for a while," continued the captain, "we decided to journey by land. These winter's gales are over boisterous."

"To London also."

"Yes, to London, by easy stages."

Anthony felt a vague disquietude. Who was this stranger that knew his name, and the girl, was she really his daughter? He glanced across the

table; surely there was little likeness between them, she so fair, he dark and swarthy. Then this other, this Corinthian, what was such a town-bird doing at Wrenford in the depth of winter and the whole village ringing with his praises?

"There was another passenger on board, wasn't there?" inquired Anthony, after a pause.

"Yes, a Doctor Prettyman, of London—it was he that attended your uncle."

There was a noticeable hesitancy in the reply, and glancing at Miss Pentreith he was surprised to see a deep flush on her face. For some reason further questions would be painful to her; this he instinctively felt, and relapsed into an awkward silence.

Supper ended and rounded off with a disproportionate grace, Captain Pentreith became absorbed in a book, while Sir Rupert talked in low tones to the girl as she sat at her sewing. As for Anthony, the fatigues and sufferings of the day, together with the heat of the log fire, began to produce an overmastering sense of drowsiness, and despite his utmost efforts he had much ado to keep his eyes open.

"You are tired," said his host, looking up; "I should have thought of it sooner, you have had a hard day."

And lighting a candle he led the way along a

narrow passage that terminated in a flight of steep and crazy stairs.

"Two of the steps are missing," said he; "housewifery was never his way."

"Whose way—Thornton's?" This at a venture, and his host turned sharply round when they reached the landing.

"How do you know that?" he asked.

"The landlord told me of such a place down in the ale-house yonder. Thornton's Folly, I think he said."

"Aye, Thornton's Folly it was and is, and the accommodation scanty; but you'll find the bed here dry and comfortable, and will sleep, I dare say, soundly enough."

Having thanked his host and bid him good night, Anthony locked the door and looked about him. It was a garret-like room, low and narrow, with a sloping roof on one side and a lattice window on the other. Signs of neglect were everywhere apparent, with immemorial cobwebs festooning the ceiling, and dried-up fungi clinging to the walls; but he was not disposed to be cavilling, and barely five minutes had elapsed before he was in a sound and dreamless sleep.

He was awakened at length by a tapping at the door, soft and persuasive at first, then peremptory. The years slipped by as the sound began to impress

itself on his awakening consciousness, and these the bony knuckles of the usher summoning to Latin. He could find it in his heart to pity him now, this half-starved pedant, and had twinges of remorse that he should have made his melancholy lot still worse. But the knocking continued, and as he opened his eyes school and usher and crabbed Latin faded away.

"Who's there?" he cried, jumping out of bed and huddling on his clothes.

"Sh! make as little noise as you can. It is I."

The girl's voice. Anthony opened the door and saw her standing at the head of the stairway, a lighted candle in her hand.

"Miss Pentreith——"

"Hush, it is not safe here."

Anthony took the candle from her hand and led the way back into the room; she was shivering like one in an ague.

"What is the matter? What is it?" he asked.

"I heard them talking; talking about you——"

"Your father and——"

"No, no, not my father, the other people in the house."

"Other people!"

"Yes, and they have waited——ever since your uncle died."

"But why?"

She gave a gesture of impatience.

"Some papers. They design to rob you—to-night."

Her tones were low and hurried, and he could see by the flickering light the terror in her eyes.

"Be quick, be quick, you must go at once."

"But your father and Mr Rycroft——"

"They must know nothing—don't stop to question me now. The stable is beneath this room. There is a ledge under the window, and then only a short drop on to the snow. But be quick, for pity's sake be quick,—I will go and fetch the key."

So saying she blew out the candle and hurried from the room, leaving Anthony standing there in a state of great astonishment and perplexity. Why should he have been spied upon? How should any one have known about the papers? Yet he remembered again the lawyer's warning, there might be some decoy, and who could doubt her eyes? Just then there was a sound of a pebble gently thrown against the window, and opening the casement he saw her standing below.

"Quick," she cried, "there is the ledge there, and the snow is soft."

Anthony swung himself out of the window and was soon by her side. She was holding a

dark lantern, and had the key of the stable in her hand.

"It works easily," said she, opening the door, and it was not long before they had the horse ready and saddled for the journey.

"But who does this belong to?" asked Anthony doubtfully.

"It is mine," said she, "you can send it back to-morrow from the inn; but quick, go now."

"And you—you are safe—they will not touch you?"

"Yes, yes, quite safe."

"I don't know how to thank you," said he, bending down from the saddle, and gazing at her as she stood there in the starlight.

"You can thank me best by obeying me. Good-bye."

He looked back at the turn of the road, and fancied that he could see the fluttering of a handkerchief, while all through that night his horse's hoofs kept shaping themselves to a "Proper New Ballade of Dolly Pentreith" of his own making:

"Dolly Pentreith is fair to see,
Dolly Pentreith,
And her eyes are as blue as eyes can be,
Dolly Pentreith.
No lady in town, in her silken gown,
Is as sweet as my love in her russet brown."

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE SIGN OF THE "ELZEVIR."

MR JAMES CRITCHETT'S house and place of business stood on London Bridge, with one side facing the narrow causeway and the other looking eastwards down the river towards the Tower and shipping. A high narrow building with projecting bays, a stoutly-framed, black-timbered place, with its rafters and its leaded panes and the sound of the waters beneath for ever echoing through the rooms. Neither was Mr James Critchett himself ill-fitted to such environment, for though but a man of fifty or thereabouts, he had by his continuous poring over folios the appearance of one at least a dozen years older, and withal a dreamy air about him that sorted with the river and book-lined shelves.

He was seated by the fire now in his high-backed chair, and so intent on the volume in his hand, a

recent acquisition, that the entrance of Bridget and her preparations for the evening meal passed unnoticed.

“Aye, aye, the fellow writes well enough,” he muttered, “and a pretty sense of style for such a fanatical rascal as he is—but come, Bridget, come, come, what’s this?”

Now Bridget was a notable woman; severe in aspect, sparing in words, inexorable in duty, and yet, if the gossips could be trusted, with a soft place in her heart left by the ravages of one of Harrison’s troopers who had gone distraught over the Book of Daniel. With her present master—if master he could be called—she had been some eight to ten years, and had it not been for her firm insistence on the practical affairs of life he would oftentimes have forgotten his dinner in the pursuance of a favourite author. As for her own studies, they were confined to the Lord’s Day and in character strictly Scriptural, while her sole relaxation consisted in attending the ministrations of one of the sequestered clergy at a secret conventicle in Fanchurch Street. Finally, let it be added that in pickling and conserving and in the making of possets and cordials and elderberry wine no daughter in Cheapside or wife of Lombard

Street could ever hope to rival her. A notable woman!

"Come, come, Bridget, what's this, moving my books again. Can I never be at peace? My Fuller there, no, no, don't shut it up, and Gesner, if you drop any grease on him, I'll never forgive you."

But Bridget, used to such tirades, took little notice.

"I don't know how it is," he went on, "but ever since that foolish Eve wanted knowledge at a single bite, there seems to be something antipathetical between women and books. They can play with and fondle and dandle and goo-goo these foolish and ephemeral infants all day long, yet I tell you, Bridget, this book I hold here will be living, yes, living and speaking centuries after every baby that now disturbs the peace of London has bitten the dust and been forgotten."

"Will you try some China tea to-night, sir?"

"Tea, tea, bless the woman, what have I to do with tea, which is new-fangled and heathenish decoction. No, Bridget, ale, good ale, for me."

"The apothecary tells me it is good for rheums."

"Aye, if it were not for women, the

apothecaries and physicians would have work to live; but I'll have none of them, nevertheless."

"And a sovereign remedy for catarrh."

"Rather the catarrh than the cure then, Bridget. But why spreading for two?"

"The young man you spoke about,—he may be here to-night."

"Aye, the lad that lawyer Applegate wrote to me anent, I had forgotten. Well, well, he is very welcome, if only for his sponsor's sake. We were boys together, Bridget, and shot our arrows in the fields, and chased each other through those far-off meadows, and bathed at noontide in the pool. Ah! the merry madcap time, the laughing, liting summer-time, what days were those, what days."

The supper served, the curtains drawn, the seacoal fire stirred to a blaze, Bridget prepared to go.

"Shall I send Peter up, sir?"

"Yes, yes, send the rascal here, he needs advice if ever 'prentice did."

A shock of hair followed by an overgrown body and Peter stood confessed. An angular youth with weak eyes, and features indeterminate.

"Hast been minding shop, sirrah?"

"Yes, master."

"And what have you sold this afternoon?"

"Nowt."

"And this morning?"

"Nowt, master."

"A pretty fellow to be pricked for Mayor. Oh yes, you'll ride in procession one of these days—a gallows one."

"I sold a broadside yesterday, master, about the Devil in Wiltshire."

"The Devil in Lombard Street, and didn't you lose a round dozen or so following that infernal cry of 'Clubs'? Yes, you may stare, but I know all about it, and for a certainty, if you don't mend your ways, you'll hansom the new stocks. Now go."

With Mr Critchett's intimates it was a fact notorious that his shop did not pay—even for candle-light—but was kept up partly from pride, partly from habit, but chiefly, as he was wont to confess in moments of confidence, that he might buy rather than sell.

"For your foolish ones must have their pates tickled by sheets and pamphlets, 'Flaming Swords in the Sky,' 'Comets,' 'News from Nowhere,' and Satan by turn in every county of England, while we that are wise are quite

content with Elzevir or Aldus, or maybe a block book on occasion."

And as he seated himself in his arm-chair that evening Mr Critchett felt more than ever thankful that a modest competency allowed him to indulge his passion in comfort.

"What more could a man wish for?" thought he, as he drew his chair snugly to the fire, "rain and wind without and warmth within."

He was still absorbed in his reading and the clock of St Saviour's had just chimed midnight, when he was suddenly startled by a knock at the door below.

"What's that? Some roysterer, I suppose, some scant-o'-grace rakehell—but where is the watch that I pay scot and lot for?"

And he resumed his book, only to be disturbed a moment later by a louder and more peremptory summons.

"Confound the fellow," he exclaimed, taking up the candle and making his way down the narrow staircase,—“confound the fellow, and if I haven't turned Dutchman those knaves at the gatehouse shall smoke for it.”

The litter of books in the shop necessitated caution, but at length the wicket was reached.

"Who's there?"

"Mr Critchett?" came a voice.

"Yes, what do you want?"

"I come from Mr Applegate, I'm——"

"Why, it's Anthony Rutherford to be sure," exclaimed the other, hastening to unbar the door. "Come in, come in, my lad, though I'd almost given up expecting you to-night, but never mind, follow me. Careful now of those things on the floor, so——"

Leading the way upstairs he lit another candle and surveyed his visitor from head to foot.

"So you're the lad, eh? Well, well, I've heard a very good account of you, I'll tell you that much."

"I must apologise for troubling you so late, but——"

"Tut, tut, think no more about it—these rascal innkeepers are best left alone; besides, I was ever your night-bird, your owl, holding it most true that thought—wherein alone man differeth from the beasts—can best be exercised when fools are on their backs. But set to, my lad, you must be famished."

Anthony ate with a will; he had tramped many miles that day, and his host sat watching him admiringly.

"Begad! what would not some of our city

aldermen give for an appetite like that? Yes, yes, we can prate as we please, and heap up riches and wisdom, but we'd all leap into young twenty-one's jerkin again if only the chance. So Mr Applegate is well, eh? Why! I have known him since he was half your age, a round tubby boy he was,—and that day he fell in the pond—he doesn't do that kind of thing nowadays, I suppose. Ah! this foolish grown-up business, this impertinence of manhood. Why! I'd throw all these books in the Thames to-night if I could only see how the meadows used to look on a summer morning."

Supper finished and a chat, Mr Critchett showed Anthony his bedroom.

"Some derelicts here," said he, pointing to a pile of volumes apologetically, "controversial divinity for the most part, impedimenta from the Army of the Saints, but if I don't find a purchaser soon, some inspired drayman, some tried and trusty 'Smite them hip and thigh'—Begad! Bridget shall have them."

So this was London, this picture that Anthony sat gazing on through the open lattice: London at last, with its moon-plashed water and its ships; London with its dark-browed Tower,

sleeping houses and romance; London of his dreams.

.

The room below looked very pleasant next morning with the wintry sun streaming through the dimity and glancing on books and ceiling and the welcoming face of Mr Critchett.

"I am afraid I am late, sir," said Anthony.

"Ah! you've seen Bridget then, eh?—with her humours and absurdities she's been trying to dragoon me into this many a year. But as I tell her, the Ten Commandments are quite difficult enough without adding a lot of non-sensical rules as to meal-times and so forth. Besides, to forsake some old choice author the moment a scrap of mutton is put on the table—'tis unmannerly."

"Was that she I met on the stairway?" inquired Anthony.

"Yes, we're only two in family, save a rascally apprentice who doesn't count. And—er—how did she look?"

"Rather severe," I thought.

"Ah! a diplomat I see, we must have you at Whitehall. But, speaking grammatically, Bridget, like an adjective, hath three aspects. Positive,

when any one can manage her; comparative, when only I can manage her; and superlative, when neither you nor I nor the devil himself can manage her."

His adventure at the farmhouse having taught him the need for caution, Anthony had travelled by a circuitous route, and it was no surprise therefore when he learnt that the hoy conveying his baggage had already dropped her anchor in the Thames.

"One can see her from here," said Mr Critchett, going to the window, "the *Nonsuch* isn't it? Ah! there she is, just by the Tower steps."

It was not long before Anthony was making his way along Thames Street to the water's edge. Such a medley of people, such raucous cries of market women and porters, jostling, shouting, and swearing, such a press and hurry of business he had hardly conceived possible, and yet, after the first confusion and bewilderment had subsided, he found himself threading his way through the streams of passengers with some approach to dexterity.

At the Tower Stairs he hailed a waterman, the only one in sight.

"I want to go to that ship over there," said he.

The fellow eyed him keenly, and a slight rusticity in his appearance did not escape him.

"Ten shillings," said he.

Anthony laughed.

"Ten shillings! Why, I could swim it in a couple of minutes."

"Well, you'd better swim it then, hadn't he, mates?" retorted the other, appealing to a crowd that had already begun to gather at the first breath of a dispute.

"Or try one of them hackney coaches," said a sympathising fish-porter.

"Hackney coach!" cried the waterman, his face blazing at the very remembrance of the dispute that chronically raged between those of his craft and their shore rivals. "Hackney coach! why devil a one will you see this day six months, and the King on our side."

"Come, come," said a tall spare man who had been edging his way through the crowd, "are you here for hire or ornament, which?"

"Eight shillings, jump in," said the waterman hastily.

"Oh no, my friend; I also want to go over to that same ship, and you'll take us both, there and back, for five."

There was something in the stranger's voice, a trick of manner that seemed familiar, and yet, try as he would, Anthony could not recollect where, if anywhere, he had previously seen him.

"There and back for five," he reiterated. And to Anthony's surprise the waterman without another word nodded his assent.

The *Nonsuch* was a stoutly built West Country vessel, designed for the coasting trade, and her deck presented a strange scene of litter and activity. Bales and barrels swinging from the hold, sailors shouting, stevedores cursing, it was with great difficulty that Anthony could make his business known.

"The captain's aft," said one more civil than the rest, "but his liver's out of order this morning and you'd best stand clear."

Anthony ventured, nevertheless, and found him in his cabin struggling with a mass of papers.

"Come now, what the —— do you want?"

"You have some baggage for me, I believe," returned the other quietly, "consigned by Mr Applegate of Wrenford."

"Are you young Mr Rutherford then?"

"Yes."

The captain's manner changed; he motioned Anthony to a seat, and going to a small locker produced a bottle of Spanish wine and some biscuits.

"Old Rough and Ready, they call me," said he, "and of course I didn't know who you were. But try some wine, right Canary this."

Anthony sipped and praised the vintage, as well he might.

"Taken in at Cadiz, this was, the very day of Worcester fight. But about this baggage of yours, Mr Applegate was main particular, and never left eyes off it till stowed."

"And there were some papers for me, I think."

"Yes, sealed in a tin case, and the Lord knows what wasn't going to happen to me if I lost 'em. But wait, you *are* the party, I suppose?"

Rummaging in the litter on his table he at length selected a little notebook, then adjusting an enormous pair of barnacles began to scrutinise Anthony with much deliberation.

"Height about five foot ten, age twenty-three, complexion fair—yes, yes, 'twill serve; scar on the right wrist and large mole at the back of the neck. No, there's certainly no doubt about the consignee."

Anthony was rather surprised at these extraordinary precautions, but judged it best to say nothing.

"And now then, young sir," continued the captain, "the sooner we get your gear ashore and safely housed at Mr Critchett's the better I shall like it."

"So you know where I live then?"

"Yon's the house," said the other, pointing it

out from the stern window, "over the ninth arch from the Southwark side. Oh! he was particular was Mr Applegate, but then very handsome as to money."

The boxes had been stored in the lazarette for the sake of greater security, but it was not long before they were swung into the dinghey and a landing made at St Magnus' Steps. Here a porter was hired, but the captain did not consider himself finally discharged of his trust till he had seen them safely into Mr Critchett's shop.

"This is the case," said he, "and thankful an end to it all—No, no, nothing owing, I've been paid handsome, but if," and here he lowered his voice to a gruff whisper,—“if you come across a tall thin man wearing a periwig, you stand by to go about.”

With which piece of advice, enforced by a solid but enigmatical wink, he took his leave.



CHAPTER IX.

THE GLAMOUR OF THE STREETS.

MOVING has it ever been, this pageantry of London, with its colour and its cruelty and its phantom shapes. London with its brooding wings, its comfort, its homeliness, its shelter against intolerable stars. London with its sin and smoke, its syren song, its myriad moods. Beautiful London, sordid London, mean, splendid, evil-hearted London.

Anthony walked through the streets like one in a maze. Never had he imagined such an assembly of carriages, such a concourse of human beings, such diversity of interests, such an intermingling of all sorts and conditions of men, and the sights and the sounds, the traffic, the people, the shops, passed in review like mere furnishings of a dream. Turning at length into Gracious Street it was not long before he came across the sign of the "Green

Lattice"—a house that Mr Critchett had particularly recommended for its fare. A substantial place it seemed and of good repute, with its massy gables, sprucely painted beams, its general air of comfort and prosperity.

"Am I in time for the ordinary?" asked Anthony.

"In time, young sir? Yes, just in time," said the busy landlord, "and in luck's way too, I warrant, for there's just one seat left. Now then, drawer, don't stand gaping about; the dishes, man, the dishes; it's twelve o'clock."

So saying he ushered Anthony into a long, narrow room that looked out on the street, and where stood a table ready laid for dinner.

"Gentlemen, the soup will be ready anon," said he, addressing a group that stood at the farther end by the fireplace; "but it appears these rascally butchers and weavers have been at their old frays again, and we to suffer. Now then, drawer!"

"Coming, sir, coming," said that harassed worthy, entering at the moment with a large tureen.

The company consisted for the most part of men at the middle age, city merchants, as Anthony judged, men of affairs, and it was soon evident that he himself was the only stranger at the table.

"There's news of the *Happy Return* run aground in the Straits," said one.

"Aye, and her people captive to the Moors, as they say."

"But her cargo?"

"Goodly freight, alack! Wines from Candia and the Levant, and coffee, silk, spice."

"Then Pentreith will smoke for it and Strange-ways, for neither of them were insured to my certain knowledge."

"But why?"

"Well, they thought the world of Captain Boyson for one thing, besides Sheriff Meynall wanted such a premium."

"Aye, trust him for that, and I notice he's been pretty chary of these Levant ventures since Blake's no longer round to knock the fear of God into them."

"Come, come, gentlemen, this won't do," said the landlord, "he was an arrant traitor, was Blake, and that we all know."

"Which may be, Master Proctor; but, oh! such a bonny fighter."

And a murmur of approval went round the table

"But this Captain Boyson, gentlemen, he often used to come here, if you remember—a jolly red-faced man, always mad for handicap."

"Oh yes, I remember. But speaking of Meynall, why isn't he here? unless," he added, pointing to a vacant seat next to Anthony, "that chair there——"

"No, no, that's for Sir Rupert Bligh."

"Fine Feathers to-day then, Master Proctor, eh? Now, what the deuce is this young popinjay come Citywards for, I wonder."

"Small mystery there," said one, "as my ledger could show. Why! what do they all come here for, these prinkers, these Corinthians, these—statesmen? Money, money, money, money, money; they and their bonarobas."

"Yes, and could make the wealth of Lombard Street look silly with Madame Castlemaine losing £25,000 at basset the other day, as I heard."

"And the Lord's Day at that."

"Sh! here he is," said the landlord, and at that moment, much to Anthony's astonishment, in came the "Mr Rycroft" that he already knew.

"I must apologise for being late," said he, laying aside his cloak, "I hope I have caused no inconvenience."

The landlord reassured him, and after a momentary silence conversation went on as before, but in subdued tones and more guardedly.

"Then am I to understand that Mr Rycroft

and Sir Rupert Bligh are one and the same?" whispered Anthony.

"Ah! it's Mr Rutherford is it?" said the other, turning sharply round. "Now I thought I knew your face when I came in the room. But didn't you leave us rather suddenly, if I remember?"

"It was necessary," said Anthony with some embarrassment. "I had had adventures on the moor,—but I'm afraid I can't explain entirely—"

"Oh! I've no wish to pry into secrets," rejoined the other; "but of course we were surprised. Yes, drawer, some mulled sack."

"I know it must have placed me in a false position," said Anthony. "And the horse, it was returned?"

"Yes, yes, safe and sound, next morning, and not a penny the worse; but don't worry further in the matter, every man has his own affairs, and I am only too glad we were able to be of any service to you."

He seemed determined to be friendly, and the conversation drifted into other channels; but Anthony would have given much to have known if he had any intimation as to the girl's part in the affair.

"So this is your first essay of London, eh? Well, well, you'll be in no hurry to leave it, I

warrant, it gets in the blood somehow, whatever the sonneteers may rave of Amaryllis and the woods. Besides, we have our Naiads here, confound them."

Dinner over, Sir Rupert proposed the Park, and accordingly they took boat at the Tower Stairs.

"It's rather fun shooting the Bridge sometimes," said he; "but the tide's nearly at the full now and there'll be nothing in it."

"The side arch, sir?" queried the waterman.

"No, no, the one near the middle there."

"It's a mill-race," said the fellow.

"All right, double fare then."

And Sir Rupert settled himself in his seat.

Anthony had been familiar with boats from childhood, and could take a hand with the best of them at Wrenford. Nevertheless, as the wherry swept towards the bridge he found it no easy matter to assume the easy nonchalance of his friend. They were making for the very arch upon which stood Mr Critchett's house, and Anthony could already hear the brawling at the piers.

"Sit close, gentlemen," said the waterman, grasping the tiller with all his strength, "for God's sake sit close. Now!"

A rush of waters, a deafening uproar, and they were through.

"That's the best one of all," said Sir Rupert. "Dead man's arch they call it, and it's worth the double fare."

Arriving at Whitehall, they made their way into the Park, where, despite the bitter cold, there was a good assembly. Most of the people had gathered at the margin of the lake to watch the skaters, and thither accordingly the young men went.

"There's the Duke of York," said Sir Rupert, "that tall, thin man who is skating rather well. He learnt it in Holland."

"The one in the fur cap do you mean?"

"Yes, and as it's too cold for many of the fair sex to come and admire his gyrations he's not over pleased, I fancy."

They stood watching the people for some time, till Sir Rupert's attention was suddenly arrested by a group approaching them from the direction of Whitehall.

"Why, here's the King," he exclaimed, "he must have got back to town; and there's Killigrew and Brouncker and the spaniels, of course."

"Which is the King?" asked Anthony.

"The one in the middle in the black cloak."

A man above middle height, angular in build, tawny of complexion, harsh in feature, but showing

very much the gentleman. This was Anthony's impression.

"He'll want to speak to me," whispered his companion. "I shall have to leave you ; where can I find you again ?"

"A letter to Mr Critchett's, London Bridge, will reach me," said Anthony, and doubted the moment afterwards whether he had been wise.

"What ! Mr Critchett, my old bookseller ? I know him well. But there's Rowley beckoning. I must go."

"Ah ! I thought I was not mistaken," said the King, as Sir Rupert came up and bowed, "and here's Tom Killigrew telling me one of his tales for the second time ; he always tells them twice nowadays—once when he's drunk, and once when he's sober, and, begad ! they're better when he's drunk."

"At any rate, I only tell them twice, your Majesty," said Killigrew, glancing at Brouncker.

"My Worcester story, you mean," laughed Charles. "Oh ! that's for country cousins and people like that, and no one can say that I don't vary it. But I want a word with Sir Rupert just now, and you must go watch my worshipful brother there trying to break his neck."

When they had gone the King walked on in

silence till they reached an unfrequented part of the Park.

"You paid the money?" he asked suddenly.

"Yes, your Majesty, I paid the money."

"The roads were bad?"

"Yes, very bad."

Charles stopped, and picking up one of the spaniels began to stroke its silky head.

"So you're glad to see me back, Floss, eh? Glad to see Charles Stuart I mean—not King Charles. Ah! well. But what was his manner like?" he added abruptly.

"His manner," said Sir Rupert. "Well, he had no manner worth speaking about, your Majesty, and what there was of it was dour enough."

"And the bill. What did he say to the bill?"

"He didn't like it. Said he would rather have money."

"Well, he's not the only one."

"But I don't think the bill will ever be presented, your Majesty."

"Why not?"

"He's dead."

The King stopped abruptly.

"Dead! Here, Floss, get down."

"It appears he had a stroke that same evening, your Majesty, and died during the night."

Charles walked rapidly to and fro for a few minutes, switching the gravel with his cane.

"Did any one live in the same house?" he asked.

"Yes, there was an old serving-woman and a young man—his nephew, I believe."

"Did he—er—do you know whether he left a will?"

"I do not know, your Majesty."

"And the young man. What is he like?"

There was a curious embarrassment about the King's manner, and it did not escape Sir Rupert's notice.

"He's tall, and strong, and passably good-looking. I think."

"And it was he, then, you were talking to just now, when I came up?"

Sir Rupert hesitated a moment, but denial was impossible.

"Yes, I met him by accident in the City to-day."

"And what is his manner like—his bearing?"

"Oh! that of a gentleman, undoubtedly."

Charles walked rapidly to and fro for some time, lost in thought.

"Has he been long with his uncle or guardian, or whatever he was?"

"He's been at Ulchester School most of his time, your Majesty, so his practical knowledge

does not amount to much more, I suppose, than blowing the bellows."

"Bellows ! What bellows ?"

"For the beech-coal, and so on."

Charles stopped and looked at him.

"Now, either the country air has had some bad effect on your pericrank, Sir Rupert, or I'm more than usually dense this afternoon, but really—what *are* you talking about ?"

"A deep dog this King of ours," thought the courtier.

"I'm getting anxious," said Charles.

"This Simon Rutherford, your Majesty, was a searcher after the secret, and——"

"Secret ! What secret ?"

"The elixir, arcanum, I know not what."

"Oh, yes, I remember hearing something of the sort ; and so he was one of those fools, was he, besides being parcel mad on the battle of Armageddon ? Well, well, the good man's solved his secret now. Down, Floss, down."

Sir Rupert watched him closely.

"Yes, deep, devilish deep, and no one even suspects it."

"Down, Floss, down ; and you, Bishop, too, I can't spend all my day stroking dogs. Besides it is late, and we must be getting back."

So saying, he turned down a pathway that led them at length to a private door.

“Well, Sir Rupert, I’m sorry you had such a rough journey, and must thank you for managing the thing so well. By the way, this young man—he is rich, I suppose.”

“So the gossip ran in the village, your Majesty.”

“Begad, then, we must have him at Court,” said Charles.

CHAPTER X.

THE FLOWER OF GRACIOUS STREET.

AFTER Sir Rupert had left him Anthony stood for some time watching the skaters, and then, the winter's afternoon drawing to its close, he made his way slowly through the Park towards Charing Cross. The sun set redly behind the trees, limning their delicate tracery, the distant shouting came faintly along the wind, and, as he paused for a moment, looking back, a feeling of loneliness possessed him, a void, a sense of solitude, as of a man superfluous.

But London, kindly mother that she is, has sovereign remedies for such moods, and he had not walked far down her crowded Strand before the shouts and banter of the apprentices, the jostling passengers, the life, movement, and colour of the street, had quite banished his melancholy humour.

"Now, it's oranges you lack, sir," cried one,

as Anthony was slowly making his way down Cheapside, "Chiny oranges, just home, and be d—d to the Dutch, and apples, lady, rosy as the morn, but we shall never be able to match your cheeks till we get them from heaven."

Anthony turned round to see what beauty could merit such a compliment, and for a moment his heart stood still.

"Miss Pentreith," he stammered.

Her colour was heightened.

"So you reached London in safety," said she.

"Yes, two days ago, and—but can I help you with that basket?"

"No, no, it is quite light, I only came out to get a few things for the house."

But Anthony insisted.

"You mustn't let me keep you," she went on, "perhaps you——"

"It is quite early yet, that is if you don't mind, besides I've seen so little of London." And indeed the cobbles of Cheapside had suddenly become cobbles of gold, and the street a fairy street, and the lights in the shops the very lamps of heaven.

"We can't let this knave go scot-free without taking some of his apples," said Anthony, buying the handsomest on the stall, despite her protests.

“And at famine prices,” she laughed.

“But it was not for the apples I paid,” quoth he.

Now, of all the goodly gear this dear old Pedler Earth has in his pack, Love is the goodliest. Stolen by the rascal, as it would seem, in the beginning, Promethean fire, and never meant for us poor hoydens. Now, put these all aside, my good Pedler, titles and honours and wealth, and beshrew thee for the fustian, but give us Love, good Pedler, give us this, only this—this.

And for Anthony the world had resolved itself into a dim setting for the ineffable she. Phantoms were the people passing, shadows merely, at the most a background to the dainty figure at his side. Could there ever be anything so entrancing, with her grey dress, and the lace at her neck, and vagrant ringlets 'neath the coif? And her face—full many a sidelong glance did Anthony steal, while the dimples at her mouth, and the rounded chin and the sweet stirring of a smile left him quite distraught. Could ever the gods have made such another creature, he wondered.

She stopped at several shops to make small purchases, and it struck Anthony as something incongruous that such a being should have any wants at all.

"Now, let me see," said she, knitting her brows, "there's that book my father wanted, we must get it here."

So saying she turned down Paternoster Row and began inquiring at the stalls, but without success, for some had just sold their last copy, and others would have copies next week, while one, honester than the rest, had frankly never heard of it.

"How tiresome," she cried, "and he so anxious for it."

"May I ask the title?"

"'Paracelsus. De Natura Rerum'," reading from a slip of paper that she held, and never had Latin sounded so entrancingly.

"'Paracelsus. De——'"

Anthony pretended deafness.

"Ah! now you are mocking me for my dreadful pronunciation."

"No, no; it has never sounded half so sweet."

"But compliments are worse still," said she.

And Anthony knew that he had never seen anything so delicious as the blush that came to her face and neck. Thereafter silence for a while, he walking as among the blest.

They had retraced their steps half-way down Cheapside before either spoke.

"You haven't told me where you live," he ventured.

"In—in Gracious Street. And you——?"

"I am staying with Mr Critchett, the bookseller, on London Bridge."

"I think my father knows him," she said.

There was a curious hesitancy in her manner, of fear almost, that did not escape Anthony's notice.

"And talking of books," said he, "the house is full of them, old ones too. Perhaps there might be a copy of 'Paracelsus. De—de——' I forget."

"No, no, not again," she laughed.

"Please."

"'De Natura Rerum,' then."

How sweet it was from the pursed lips, and Anthony's thoughts went back to the old school-room at Ulchester, with its dusty desks, its summer sun through the open door, and the droning voice of the usher. What a dull affair was Latin then.

"I think I must say good-bye now," said she, as they reached the Exchange.

"But I may see you home? Gracious Street is only a step from here."

"No, no, I—I would rather go by myself."

Again the curious hesitation, and Anthony wondered.

"You must think me very rude," she went on, "but I have reasons—please do not ask me now."

He stood gazing at her, drinking in the seconds.

"And if Mr Critchett has that book?" said he.

"Send it to—" she paused a moment, "yes, send it to the house opposite the sign of the 'Green Lattice,' in Gracious Street."

"And I may not bring it, then?" said he regretfully. "The distance so short, too."

"No, no," she answered hastily, "for my sake, your sake, please send it—don't come to the house. Oh! I can't explain, and you must think it so strange, but be careful in London. You are in danger, and—and, above all things, don't speak to a—to a tall thin man."

The tall thin man again, and Anthony looked at her in astonishment,—at the flushed cheeks and parted lips, and the fear in her eyes. But he forbore questioning her.

"I will be careful—for your sake."

"For my sake, then," said she, holding out her hand. But oh! the pressure of that soft palm, and how dull the street looked when she had gone, and what random answers he gave to Mr Critchett's questionings, and how the river prattled beneath the arches that evening, and what things it promised!

Arriving home, Dorothy Pentreith went straight to her bedroom, nor would she suffer the ordinary attentions of her maid.

"No, no, Mary, you may go now, I can manage all right, but let me know when my father comes in."

Left alone, she unfastened her coif and tried to bring the wandering ringlets to some show of order, a task not easy at the best of times and this afternoon more than usually unmanageable. But I doubt if one had had the privilege of peeping over her shoulder and into the looking-glass there would have been found much to cavil at, for the nose was delicate, the mouth a thing of beauty, the curtained eyes dove's eyes, while even the non-conforming ringlets—well—the neck was worth nestling against, the ear was worth whispering into, and one could hardly blame them.

"And as for you, Mr Mirror, I've been looking into you far longer than I've ever done before and ought to be ashamed of myself."

Whereat she blushed, then laughed, then blushed the deeper.

But presently she was interrupted by Mary.

"There's some one to see you," said the girl, "but save me, mistress, how pretty you are!"

Mary was gazing in unaffected admiration, a

healthy-looking country girl she, with good-humour in every line.

“Don’t be so foolish,” cried Dorothy, blushing more than ever, “but tell me who it is.”

“A young gentleman, so grand and fine too, talks like the King he does, and wants to see you or master, or both of you.”

“Well, tell him I’ll be down in a few moments; and Mary, remember you mustn’t stare at people, and you mustn’t be surprised at anything or anybody. That is our London way.”

But Mistress Dorothy was in a great state of agitation after the girl had gone.

“Surely it can’t be—after what I said—I’ll never forgive him else.”

Meanwhile Sir Rupert, having been shown into the withdrawing room below, seated himself by the window and gazed critically at his surroundings. A large room, running through the depth of the house, with one lattice toward the street, the other looking into a garden. The fire, spluttering on the hearth, threw into relief the oaken beams, the panelling, the heavy furniture, but that which in especial rivetted Sir Rupert’s attention was a portrait above the chimney-piece, done in oils.

“How like her, and how enchanting! Painter Lely too, that all the Court raves about, and this

father of hers, this mysterious City merchant, or Sea Captain, or Jesuit spy, or whatever he may be, is evidently a man of substance. How got, another matter."

He was still engaged in scanning the picture when the door opened and the original stood before him.

"I must pray your pardon for having called so late," said he.

"You are very welcome, Mr Rycroft."

What a background was the panelling to that aureola of hair! How caressingly the firelight played on the ringlets!

"It is a great privilege to be able to compare the two," said he, "and beautiful as the picture is——"

"It was painted about a year ago," said she, "and considered a good portrait, I believe. Mary, one of those candles goes on the oaken press."

This to the girl, who had entered at that moment, and was looking from one to the other with a gaping curiosity.

"Put another log on the fire, Mary, please, and—let me know when my father comes in."

For the first time in his life almost, Sir Rupert found himself at a nonplus for words and could only sit there wondering at her beauty.

"Rycroft is—is not my real name," he stammered at length.

"Not your real name?"

"No, I had to assume one—it was important. Rupert Bligh is my name—and——"

"Sir Rupert Bligh, is it not?"

"Yes, I believe—er——"

She began to laugh, such a merry laugh; he never thought to have heard such music.

"Surely you must know whether you are a baronet or not."

"Yes, well, Sir Rupert Bligh, then."

"I think I have heard of you."

"The devil take it then," thought he, "for she can't have heard much good."

And her face had become serious and her brow knitted as she sat there gazing into the fire, and when she glanced at him again, he thought he found a look, almost of defiance, in the grey eyes.

"I hope you will not think worse of me for the deceit," he ventured.

"I have no knowledge of the Court, or Court policy, and you say it was necessary."

"Believe me it was—absolutely necessary."

She looked at him keenly; there was an earnestness in his manner, quite unusual.

"I had no choice, I was acting for others," he urged.

Born in the candle atmosphere of court, too young to remember the deadly earnestness, the fierce passions that raged in his childhood, he had necessarily assimilated much of the mental enervation of the period, and, this afternoon, almost for the first time, did he realise that life, after all, might be something more than a matter of mere gentlemanly criticism. And he would have given much—everything—to have stood well in her esteem.

"I hope you will not think the worse of me," he reiterated.

"The worse—why should I? Besides, you were in time."

"In time?"

"To see Mr Simon Rutherford before he died."

It was a chance shaft but successful, and had he not been relieved from the necessity of answering by a jangling at the bell below he could hardly have met those steady eyes of hers.

"Ah! that must be my father," said she.

And a moment later Captain Pentreith entered the room, his dark and sombre face lighting at the sight of his daughter.

“Dorothy, girl, I am late, I’m afraid,” said he, stroking her hair with his great brown hand. “Mr Rycroft, you are very welcome, in fact I have been inquiring for you this afternoon.”

Sir Rupert bowed but said nothing, while Dorothy, after glancing keenly from one to the other, made sudden pretext of household matters and left the room.

“Have you any news?” asked the courtier.

“Not a trace of him, Sir Rupert.”

“You know my name then?”

“I’ve guessed it all along,” said the other.

“Well, Rycroft’s dead and buried anyway, and I was just telling Miss Pentreith as you came in. But I have seen our friend.”

“Seen him!”

“Met him by chance at the ‘Green Lattice’ opposite—took him to the Park—boon companions—quite.”

“That’s good; but why did he leave so suddenly that night?”

Sir Rupert stroked his chin.

“The young man is very circumspect; he would not tell me.”

“And he is living—where?”

But Sir Rupert still continued to stroke his chin.

"Yes, devilish circumspect, and not to be choused."

"Ah! well, we shall soon find out, and the prize is well worth the venture."

The courtier rose from his chair.

"You must go?" asked Captain Pentreith.

"I have an appointment, and the clock of St Magnus is already at seven. By the way, that book, the 'Paracelsus'; you said you had it."

"It has been lost or mislaid, I find, but I will have a copy ready for you the next time you come."

"I wanted to look at a formula, that is all. And—and, you think the old man really solved the secret?"

Sir Rupert had paused at the door, his hand on the latch.

"I can assure you that the fact of his discovery of projection has been known to many foreign esoterics for some time past."

"But was this Simon Rutherford the same man?"

"From the description I got of him down at Wrenford, almost certainly."

"And this nephew—what are we to do?"

Captain Pentreith paced the room for some moments before answering.

“He is too young for such a secret, Sir Rupert.”

“And this same fashionable craze for chemistry may serve me a good turn,” he mused, when the courtier had gone. And thereafter fell into a brown study till interrupted by the re-entrance of his daughter.

“Ah ! Dorothy, lass, is that you ?”

He stood up and put his hands on her shoulders and the hard lines quite faded from his face.

“Dorothy, Dorothy, you look just the same as she did,—that summer evening in the cornfield—long ago.”



CHAPTER XI.

MY LADY CASTLEMAINE.

My Lady Castlemaine was in one of her tantrums this morning, and her tire-maid had but a sorry time of it.

"No, no, no, Morris, haven't I told you a thousand times till I'm tired of telling that the hair must be a little higher on that side? But I might as well talk to a block."

It was no easy task this of the toilet, for my lady's tongue was bitter.

"It is more of the fashion, madam."

"Fashion! Fashion! Why do you talk to me of fashion? I set the mode, I."

"Some of the ladies I've seen wearing it," said Morris meekly.

"And I've seen country hoidens at a wedding with their hair in queues; that's where you get your ideas from, Morris—from the gutter."

“But Mistress Stewart—she has it so.”

The unfortunate woman could hardly have hit upon a more inflaming comparison.

“Stewart! Stewart!” cried the enraged beauty, “speak to me of Stewart and her mincing ways, simpering face, and tousled head, with hardly more sense in it than there is in yours, Morris.”

Perhaps there was a spice of malice in the maid’s suggestion, for it was an open secret that the Castlemaine’s star had waned something ever since the day when Mistress Stewart, with her little Roman nose and dancing eyes and fascinations came to Court.

“For my part, I cannot think what folks see in her,” said Morris.

“Nor I,” retorted my lady.

The room—half boudoir, half dressing-room—had an air of Oriental luxury in its furnishings, and Lady Castlemaine was seated at a table set in confused array with the mysteries of the toilet. Scents and smelling-salts, puffs and pins and paints and pomander boxes, and Morris was kept very busy the while attending to all her mistress’s whims and fancies and particularities.

Presently my lady rose and gazed at herself full length in the mirror. The red lips, the damask cheeks, the glancing eyes, the glorious hair, the

utter pride of life, and now—a faded portrait, some yellow lace perhaps : these from the wrack of things. And there came a wistful look into my lady's eyes.

“Sometimes I wish, Morris—heigh-ho !—I don't know what I wish. But see who that is,” she added, as there came a tapping at the door.

“There's Master Laverick below, and wishing to see you at once.”

“Show him up, Morris; then leave me.”

And a moment later there entered a tall, thin man of about thirty, with his light hair carefully parted, and his suit, though threadbare, neatly disposed.

“So you've deigned to come back at last, have you ?” cried Lady Castlemaine, “and it's more than a month since I saw you.”

Laverick seated himself composedly in a chair.

“I have been in London some days,” said he.

“And why didn't you come here at once ?”

“The trail was not complete.”

“You are in my service,” she cried imperiously, “and I tell you this, Master Laverick, I will be obeyed.”

“You must have patience, my lady.”

“Patience, patience, don't talk to me of patience. What did you find out ?”

"We were on a false scent as far as that was concerned, and Mistress Stewart has no more to do with the business than last year's clouds."

"Well, well, what happened then is nothing to the purpose."

"If your ladyship will bear with me a moment, I think it may be very much to the purpose. Believe me, it is worth listening to."

"Go on, then, go on."

"You will remember that you thought Sir Rupert's summons might have something to do with the King and Mistress Stewart, but he led me a longer dance than that—danced me into Cornwall, in fact."

"Cornwall!"

"Six days of it, and at the end a little coastwise village, Wrenford by name. Work enough, too, keeping up with him, for his roadster was better than mine."

"Did he see you at all?"

"No. I kept two or three hours behind him, finding out his direction from ostlers and so forth, and on arriving at Wrenford followed him that same afternoon along the beach, where he was met by an old man, evidently by appointment."

My Lady Castlemaine was becoming interested.

"What was the old man like?" she asked.

"Sour-looking enough, and, as far as I could judge in the uncertain light, one of Cromwell's stalwarts. But I was hiding behind a boulder thirty yards away, for the shore was lonely, and the danger——"

"Well, well, you shall have your reward. Go on."

"I followed them to a cave, crept behind some bushes at the entrance, and though there was a continuous roar of wind and surf in my ears, managed to find out that Sir Rupert Bligh paid this old man a large sum of money, and that similar sums had probably been paid before."

"But why, and who from?"

"Sir Rupert himself didn't know why; and who from I leave your ladyship to guess."

She rose from her chair, and walked up and down the room for some moments.

"Why don't you go on; why are you staring at me?"

"Madam, you can hardly ask any one not to—to look at you."

"Delicately turned, Master Laverick, but what happened next?"

"When I judged my hiding-place was no longer safe, I crept up a narrow path to the top of the cliff. Presently Sir Rupert came from the cave and made his way along the beach towards Wren-

ford again, and now it was that I saw for the first time a vessel dangerously near the rocks, having missed stays, as they say. Sir Rupert caught sight of it at the same moment, and hurrying forward to the jetty, where nearly the whole village was congregated, performed as great a piece of gallantry as ever I hope to see."

"What! Sir Rupert Bligh?"

"Yes, carrying a line to the end of the pier, the seas sweeping over him nearly the whole distance, he managed at last to get a rope to the ship and bring her people into safety."

"He comes of good stock," said my lady; "but what happened next?"

"It was a day of surprises and adventures," Laverick went on, "and the first person who stepped on shore was Captain Pentreith."

"Of Gracious Street, you mean?"

But my lady's indifference was a little over-acted.

"Yes, of Gracious Street," he answered slowly.

"Well?"

"And the old man, Simon Rutherford by name, died that night."

"Died! you don't mean——"

"Oh! Sir Rupert had nothing to do with it," returned the other coolly; "the old man died in

his bed of an apoplexy, and I was in attendance."

"You!"

"Yes, I had to assume some sort of a disguise to the fool villagers, and having in my nonage served an apprenticeship to old Surgeon Horniblow, of Lothbury, and there learned to compound and dispense, and look wise and talk nonsense, I clapped on a periwig and became a travelling apothecary in search of simples."

My Lady Castlemaine regarded him for some moments in a kind of admiration.

"Now, I think you are as subtle a rogue as there is in London."

Master Laverick flushed slightly.

"Would you have me play the Bobadil?" he asked.

"'Twas a compliment," said she, "and as good a disguise as you could have chosen."

"Well, as things turned out, it was, for when news came of the old man's illness I offered my services, thinking, perhaps, to get the secret——"

"And did you?"

"No, unfortunately, I didn't, for as ill-luck would have it, there came another physician on the scene—one Prettyman, of London,—who happened to be a passenger on the Dutch galiot, and of

course the humble apothecary had to give way before the great man."

"So all came to nought, then?"

"No, not entirely—but I am tiring your ladyship."

"Please go on," said she.

"Well, to cut a long story short, the old man died that night, carrying his secret elsewhere, but, thinking that something of benefit to your ladyship might yet transpire, I still stayed on in the village, especially as a strict friendship seemed to have sprung up between Sir Rupert Bligh and Captain Pentreith. His daughter——"

"Daughter!"

"Yes, Captain Pentreith had his daughter on board."

"What is she like?"

"As pretty a girl as you can imagine," said the other with enthusiasm.

"Fair or dark?"

"As fair as—as——"

"Come, come, never muddle your brains with rhetoric; we must see this beauty for ourselves. But what happened?"

"They decided to come to London by road, all except Dr Prettyman, who went away in the

galiot, I believe. And it was young Anthony they were after."

"Really, here is a very wandering tale, Master Laverick; who's young Anthony, pray?"

"Nephew and heir of this same Simon Rutherford, and presumably in his secrets."

My Lady Castlemaine sat with knitted brows. Anything that might increase her influence over Charles was welcome.

"I think I begin to see your drift," said she; "but this—this Pentreith, what manner of man is he?"

Laverick could not trust himself to look at her.

"Oh, he's dark and stoutly built, and on the forehead a noticeable scar—got on the Spanish Main, perhaps," he added, with a swift glance.

"But why——"

'Things happen on the Spanish Main.'

My lady was silent for some moments.

"But still I don't see how he could be concerned, landing as he did by mere accident."

"Well, all I know of the matter is that after staying at the 'Galleons' for some days, they moved to a place called 'Thornton's Folly,' and that Master Anthony Rutherford, beginning his journey

to London on the day following, was benighted on the moor, and put up at this very farm."

"And they were watching him, you think?"

"Yes, and so was I."

"But what for?"

"This Simon Rutherford, it appears, was one of the Illuminati—a Rosicrucian—a holder of the great arcanum, and thought no more of turning tin plates into gold than I might of shelling peas. So the gossips in the village told me, and as Sir Rupert Bligh dabbles also in these mysteries, he might think——"

"But Captain Pentreith——"

"I don't think he would be such a fool."

"And the King certainly wouldn't. But this young man, you followed him to London."

"He gave me the slip, unfortunately."

"So you've been wasting my time with all this rigmarole and nothing at the end of it," cried my lady,—“a pretty spy, indeed.”

"It's been time and trouble to me," said the other, "and money and danger to me, and no man can do more than his best."

"You have done very well, Master Laverick," said she in conciliatory tones, "but if he is in London you must find out where he lives. Here is money."

She went to a cabinet and gave him a small bag of gold, which he had just pocketed with a look of great complacency, when they were interrupted by Morris at the door.

"There is a gentleman, Captain Pentreith, wishes to see you, Madam."

"Captain Pentreith," cried Laverick in alarm; "he must not see me, 'twould spoil all; but I didn't think your ladyship knew him."

"Neither do I," she answered coolly enough; "but you must go down this private stairway, through the mews, so." And she had barely time to draw the curtain again over the door before her visitor was announced.

"So you have got back from France, then," she began abruptly.

"Yes, a few days ago."

"Were you successful?"

"No."

She rose from her chair and began pacing up and down the long apartment, while Captain Pentreith sat watching her with a kind of sombre admiration.

"This Louis, what is he like?" she asked.

"Well, I think Europe will hear of him, and certainly no one else there is of much account. But I found him difficult to deal with."

"We must have money," said my lady; "there is this Dutch business, and the Navy."

Captain Pentreith smiled sardonically.

"Yes, money slips away," said he, "and gambling debts accrue, and——"

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

He might have taken warning had he but looked at her eyes more attentively.

"I said that money—slipped away—that is all."

"And with no Acapulco galleon on the horizon to mend matters," she retorted.

He was toying with the hilt of his sword, she watching him as a cat a mouse. A momentary compression of the lips, a slight change of colour in the bronzed cheeks, but it was enough.

"It is Lady Castlemaine that speaks in riddles now," said he.

She laughed, lightly at first, then mockingly, finally without control.

"Hide not thy light under a bushel, Master Pentreith; we had it from Dr Glenham last Sunday se'nnight. So it's 'dead men don't bite, eh! and no peace beyond the line?' Fine simple rules and easily remembered."

"Your ladyship is distraught."

Again the irrepressible laughter, hysterical almost.

“Distraught is it, Master Pentreith? Aye, and such pleasant dreams o’ nights of ruddocks and pistoles, and ingots of silver. Distraught, eh? Yes, and visions too, at times—tall ships, bloody decks, dying men, curses and the clash of steel.”

It would have gone ill with my Lady Castlemaine had she been a man, and even as it was there came a glooming look into his face that made her pause.

“Come, come, Captain, never glare at me like a basilisk; these indiscretions, youthful errors let us call them, happened so long ago; and after all, who cares?”

His face had become expressionless, quite immobile.

“Really, Madam, I am at a loss.”

She suppressed with an effort a tendency to laugh, and then in altered tones.

“Let us leave it at that, then, Captain; say that I dreamt it all. At any rate you must acknowledge that I have discretion, and some facility in gaining early news.”

“Was that your message then about the loss of the ‘Happy Return’ in the Straits?”

“Yes, I knew you had shares there, and sent it off the moment I heard it.”

“Well, it has saved us heavy losses. I went on

'Change at once, and disposed of our interest to Sheriff Meynell, Bakewell and others.

"They can well afford it," she laughed.

"Yes, as you say, and the news wasn't even whispered on 'Change till the following afternoon, so there could be no suspicion."

"Captain Pentreith is becoming particular."

"Credit is everything in the City," said he gravely; "but—this room is safe, no possibility of listeners, I suppose?"

"Safe as the grave,—why?"

"Well, I can't say much at present, but I fancy I've stumbled across something that will make a certain idle fellow about the Court here, Charles Rex by name, very civil."

"What is it—tell me."

"It's only guesswork at present, but I'll let you know as soon as I know myself."

"And it will make him quite—quite obedient?"

"Absolutely."

.
Now when Captain Pentreith had gone, my lady gave the rein to a great deal of merriment.

"You remember those two who visited me this morning, Morris?"

"Yes, Madam."

"And they looked very clever men, didn't they?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Well,—those are politicians, Morris." And my lady found some difficulty in suppressing a tendency to hysteria.

CHAPTER XII.

A CLOUD.

LONDON presented so many fascinations to Anthony that he had little time for aught else, and the packet, once safely lodged in Mr Critchett's safe, was hardly given another thought. Hopeless indeed was the day that could keep him within doors, though one spell of rain, lasting nearly a fortnight, had effectually put a period even to his enthusiasm. Day after day of incessant downpour, day after day with never a rift or a patch of blue or a gleam of the sun as he stood there at the lattice disconsolate.

"Chimney - corner times these," Mr Critchett would say; "better than all your sweltry dog days that only serve to breed ill-humours and distempers and I know not what."

But Anthony looked doubtful.

“Days for drawn curtains and closed windows, days for blazing logs and candlelight, days for old slippers and old wine, old folios and old friends.”

They were seated on opposite sides of the hearth this Sunday evening, listening to the murmur of the tide and the rain that beat in gusts against the panes. The chimes of St Saviour were ringing a last appeal, and the sounds, now loud now faint, now clamorous and insisting, anon at an infinite distance, came fitfully along the wind.

“On a night like this,” said Anthony, drawing his chair into the chimney-corner, “yes, we are in the best place.”

Mr Critchett looked round the room with an air of tranquil satisfaction; at the firelight glancing on the rafters and the red blinds, and the walls clothed in books.

“Aye, the best place, lad, the best place if—if——”

He stopped abruptly and stared into the fire, his eyes lack-lustre, dreamy.

Anthony watched him curiously. This quietude,—he found it hard to understand,—he, in the headiness of youth.

“Do you never feel lonely?” he asked.

"Lonely! I have my books."

"Yes, but——"

Mr Critchett took up an aldine of Horace that lay upon the table and put it against his cheek.

"I live in the past," said he, "and am more at home in the Appian Way than ever in Pall Mall. This fellow, look you, why, I know him better than his patron, and many the cup of lulling Massic we've had together."

"But still——"

"Well, I've two or three old cronies, here in the City, mine ancient friends, who come o' nights to smoke the calumet of peace."

"And yet——"

Silas Critchett turned his gaze to the fire again and Anthony thought that his eyes were dimmed.

"Lad," said he, "I know what you mean, and though it happened so long ago, God! what a blank is in the rooms."

Again the dreamy look, lack-lustre, as he stared at the logs.

"Dear eyes had she that used to brim with very love itself, and for three years we walked together, as in the Vale of Tempe. But she was—and is not—is not—O God! God!"

He put his head between his hands in an attitude of hopelessness, and Anthony began to understand why his figure was so bent and the face so lined.

“There in that very chair, there where you are sitting, and I would look up from my books perhaps, and our eyes would meet, and she would come over and put her arms round my neck and say how she loved me. It was angels’ music that, Anthony.”

The eyes were dimmed now, and the firelight a dancing blur.

“Pray, lad, pray that you never become too fond of any one, sport for the gods perhaps, but for us—— ’Twas just such another gusty night she died, her dear breaths, fainter and fainter, then, O God, the stillness. And the bells were ringing as now, torturing bells, insistent bells, with the secret of it all in their iron clangour could we but understand.”

And the firelight became quite blotted out, and thereafter that evening they spoke but little.

It was a noticeable fact that in all Anthony’s wanderings through London, and however far afield his curiosity might take him, no inconsiderable part of each day was spent in the neighbourhood of Gracious Street. Now it was

that the "Green Lattice" began to have a very regular customer, and few indeed were the days that passed without his presence at the ordinary. Mysterious too, this young stranger and subject for gossip, and many were the conjectures amongst serving-men and drawers as to his business. Some would have it that he was in the pay of the Dutch come over to spy out the nakedness of the land, others held that he was a Jesuit from St Germain, an emissary of France and one of the advance-guard for the conversion of England. All alike were agreed that he was on the watch—very intently on the watch, and that as he sat there in the window seat, his coign of vantage, very few people that passed escaped his observation. One thing in especial was noticed, first called attention to by one of the maids, that the sight of a wimple or a mob-cap in the distance would put him into a fervour of excitement, and that thereafter he would in many cases immediately clap his hat on and disappear precipitately into the street.

Watch as he might, however, poor Anthony's perseverance met with little encouragement, and though he caught sight of Miss Pentreith several times, once only did he have the opportunity of

speaking with her. Even then she was in such an obvious state of uneasiness and apprehension that the interview was but a short one.

"If you could only tell me more," he pleaded, "I might take steps; as it is——"

She looked the very picture of distress.

"I can't. Oh! don't you see that I can't, but I know that you are shadowed and your every movement known."

She was glancing uneasily up and down the street.

"Perhaps it's the tall, thin man," said he with a smile, striving to reassure her.

"Have you seen him?" she asked eagerly.

"Not that I know of."

"Nor — Sir Rupert Bligh — Mr Rycroft, I mean?"

A dark feeling of jealousy sprang at once and fully armed into his soul, and he remembered now that he had seen them after supper that night at "Thornton's Folly" talking very confidentially as it seemed.

"I have met him once or twice," said he, "and so Sir Rupert Bligh is also amongst these watchers, eh? Really there must be something very interesting about me."

There came a dimness into her eyes as she

gazed at him, and he would have given much to have recalled the words.

"I wondered whether you had seen him again, that is all."

"Miss Pentreith, I—I am sorry——"

"There is nothing to be sorry about, Master Rutherford," said she. "I asked a question, which you have answered, that is all."

And with a courtesy she left him.

Anthony walked about the streets of London for the rest of that day in a state near to distraction. The shops, the people, the houses, the traffic served now but as a dun background to his misery. He had lost her, now and for ever, she would never speak to him again, and the brief glimpse into paradise was at an end. How he cursed himself for his foolish words, and what would he not have given to have been able to recall them. What plans did he not evolve, what wild schemes of reparation as he sat in his old seat again at the "Green Lattice"? He would call on her, demand to see her, wait till he did see her; he would not let this beatitude slip through his fingers without a struggle. "Pray, lad, pray that you never become too fond of any one, sport for the gods perhaps, but for us——" The words kept ringing in his ears, but

it was too late now, for with him the world had fined down to a mere setting for a face, a sweet face with its aureola of ringlets, a grave face with its reproachful eyes. "Pray, lad, pray that you never become too fond of any one," and life was an empty shard and love a curse.

Late that afternoon he kept his place of vantage at the window, hoping to catch a glimpse of her even were it but her shadow on the blind.

"Surely she cannot be quite indifferent, else why this trouble."

Desolate a soul as any in London then, as he stood there looking at the rain and the shining cobbles and the hurrying passers-by. "Sport for the gods, perhaps." And the waters dropped forlornly from the eaves and gurgled down the runnels of the road. "Sport for the gods." —Poor humanity!

He buttoned up his cloak against the pelting rain and pressed his hat low on his forehead, and, as he did so, there came the recollection of a look in her grey eyes, a look that shone through all resentment, a soft look, and with the remembrance came a new-found hope which made the desolate evening seem less desolate and the driving cloudland less forlorn.

"Yes, surely she likes me, surely a little."

On arriving home he was surprised to find Mr Applegate, the lawyer, comfortably installed.

"Well, lad, you see I have not been long in following you, but I got the wandering spirit in me when—

'Longen folk to gon on pilgrimages.'"

"It's a good many years since I saw you, John," said Mr Critchett, rubbing his hands.

"Aye, aye, but we were younger then, James, younger then, that night we pulled down all the signboards 'twixt Dunstan's and the Fleet."

"Yes, and a shrewd fray we had of it with the 'prentices, and my business in this world nearly finished by a club."

"Mad times, mad times, James Critchett, and no such doings nowadays, I suppose?"

"Nowadays," cried the bibliophile in scorn—"nowadays, why, your 'prentice lad of nowadays will be tucked in bed by ten o'clock thinking how best to cheat his master on the morrow; and as for your Templar, it's a pale and bloodless youth these times that never thinks to look into a pot at midnight."

Mr Applegate chuckled.

"And what became of Tommy Twigg?" he asked.

"What, Tommy Twigg of the 'Triple Tunne,' that we locked in his own cellar one night and threw the key down the well. Oh, he's dead, long dead. Took to religion latterly, and violently at that. A notable maunder of theatres and taverns and so forth, and died in his bed, most edifyingly as they say."

"Dear, dear. 'O tempora! O mores!' And his daughter, a bonny lass, I remember."

"She also found grace and a pastor of Amsterdam, predestination and Plymouth gin."

"What an alliterative and cynical rascal have we here," laughed the lawyer, "and the 'Triple Tunne' itself—a conventicle, I suppose?"

"No, no, that's just the same," said Mr Critchett, "and it's only the other day that I stepped in to renew the old acquaintanceship. The room was unchanged, the red blinds, the chimney seat, the pictures, the beams, a little dingier perhaps, but just as we knew it, and the dent in the panelling still there, that afternoon Digby flung the quart pot at Somers, you remember, when they quarrelled over a Greek quantity."

"Yes, yes, and a duel outside, quite a stir.

Dear me, dear me, it's only yesterday, and Somers turned out wrong, didn't he?"

"No, no, it was Digby that was wounded."

"Ah, yes, I remember now, but what became of them afterwards?"

"Dead, both, and on the same day, Cropredy Bridge fight."

"Poor lads, poor lads. And so you looked in at the old place again, James, eh?"

"Yes, to think of it, and the many that have gone the dusty road since then; and two youths there were, laughing and talking and scheming, just as we used to do, John, but somehow the jokes seemed trite and commonplace, and the schemes impossible, and the laughter a mistake."

Mr Applegate was drumming his fingers on the table.

"I'm afraid things have changed," said he, "and somehow—I've often noticed it of late—the trees are not as green as they used to be nor the lasses half so fine. But this is very good Burgundy of yours, James."

"Let us make a compact," said Mr Critchett, "and I'll fill your glass and mine. Don't let us quarrel, John—ever."

"My hand to it," said the lawyer with enthusiasm. And the glasses were emptied together.

Anthony watched the ceremony with interest, and both of them catching his eye at the same time, both dissolved in laughter.

"Begad, I had forgotten our client here entirely," said the lawyer, "and a couple of doting old fools must he think us."

At this point Bridget entered with fresh candles, but evinced not the slightest curiosity at the presence of Mr Applegate.

"It is meeting night, sir," said she.

"Meeting night is it, Bridget? Well, well, we shan't want anything. And I'm an accessory before and after the fact," he added as she closed the door, "for it's some d——d conventicle she attends in Fanchurch Street, presided over by the Reverend Tribulation Basham, a cobbler by trade and 'maultext' by adoption. But after all it's no business of mine, and I—er—well, I don't interfere."

"I'm sure you are wise, James."

"She certainly is a most remarkable woman," said Mr Critchett, rubbing his hands.

Presently Mr Applegate settled himself at the table.

"It is your affairs, my dear lad, that have brought me to London—things may turn out more serious than I imagined. By the way, have you those papers handy?"

"They're upstairs," said Anthony, "I'll fetch them down."

Lighting a taper he made his way up the narrow staircase that led to the top of the house, but on opening the door of his bedroom a gust of wind suddenly extinguished the feeble glimmer.

"I could have sworn I shut this lattice an hour ago," thought he, as he leant out of the casement.

The rain had by this time ceased and the moon was struggling through a wrack of cloud. The river, dappled in fitful light, swirled and eddied far beneath, while the forest of masts and rigging, the houses and distant Tower, hung darkling as in a picture.

He was just about to close the window when his curiosity was aroused by a small boat with two men in her, which, coming from beneath the counter of a ship, made towards the bridge, and was finally secured to one of the very piers over which Mr Critchett's house stood.

"What can they be doing there at this time of night," thought he, and his surprise was still greater when one of them looking up, waved his hand and gave a long whistle. Anthony waited a moment, then, more from impulse than any other motive, imitated the sound as closely as he could. The effect was instantaneous and astonishing. They cut the

painter, seized their oars, and sculling down the river as fast as they could were soon lost in a maze of shipping.

"Some water thief," thought he, "but it's strange I hit their danger signal so to a nicety."

Taking the papers from the top drawer of the press, Anthony carefully locked the door behind him and went down to the library again.

"Sit down, lad, sit down, and you needn't mind speaking out, for Mr Critchett already knows the gist of your affairs. Now, tell me, are you watched?"

"Watched?"

"Yes, here in London."

Anthony recounted his experiences, but with a judicious omission of Miss Pentreith's name.

"And what is he like?" Mr Applegate asked.

"Tall and spare—the fellow who came on board the hoy with me."

The lawyer stroked his chin.

"Does he wear a periwig?"

"No, I'm certain of that."

"Well, it may be the same man nevertheless, one that gave himself out as a travelling apothecary at Wrenford."

"Ah, that's where I've seen him," cried Anthony, "there was something about his face and manner;

he came to my poor guardian that night, I remember now."

"He was continually hanging about the jetty down there, especially the day your papers went on the coaster, and begad, now I come to think of it, I didn't see him after that."

"But what could he possibly want?" queried Mr Critchett.

"Ah, there it is, James. Now let us have another look at that will, Anthony."

Mr Applegate spread the document before him and adjusted his spectacles.

"This is all very simple," said he, "not a loophole or a quibble in it, and if every last will and testament were like this we lawyers might go hang. However, I don't think we need be frightened of a dearth of stupidity. Now for the other."

It had been carefully re-sewn in its parchment covering, which Mr Applegate as carefully unfastened.

"Listen, James, this is it:—'To my beloved ward, Anthony Rutherford. When you read this I shall be dead, and must leave it to you how to act—I dared not have them near me for many reasons—"When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness"—perhaps they had better lie there and rot—hawks are abroad—and yet——' And that is every word."

Mr Critchett considered for a while.

"Some papers hidden somewhere, eh? and this is the plan. Let me sit down a moment, John."

Taking out a pocket lens he examined the map carefully for some moments.

"I can help you here," said he; "these are the marshes, this the road, this the commencement of the forest, and even the miles are marked; I know the district well. London 10½. Yes, that's it."

Both Anthony and the lawyer were eagerly leaning over his shoulder.

"The plan seems to end here," said Mr Applegate, "but what's this in the corner?"

The double line representing the road stopped abruptly, and against it was written the following: "LH NE1750 BT. N 1½M.L. TonP. R.R."

"Your guardian seems to have had a taste for riddles," exclaimed the lawyer, and all three stared blankly at the sheet.

"NE may stand for North East and N for North," said Mr Critchett at length.

"James, that's an idea, and the place itself may give some further information; at any rate we'll take a compass."

"You are going then?" said Anthony.

"Going, why, yes, to be sure: we'll go to-morrow."

CHAPTER XIII.

THREE AND AN EXPLORATION.

THE "Green Lattice" was always astir betimes, and long before daylight the inn yard was in a state of activity. First a carrier, yawning from his hay and wishing that he had left the last night's pottle-pot alone; then the ostler, swearing at his lantern, and longing for the time when he also might play mine host and lie abed o' mornings; anon a maid in one of the galleries very much awake and bent on teasing.

"Now then, Dan Ostler, for all the lazy, idle good-for-nothings in London——"

"Oh! it's you, is it, and that tongue of yours would stretch from here to Charing."

"Awake at last, eh? Well, well, wonders will never cease, and it might be an alderman by the way it sleeps."

"Here a clamour to have to put up with from

morning till eve while these lucky devils of carriers can come and go as they please. But you do look pretty this morning, Nancy," he added something irrelevantly.

"Now then, Impudence."

"Pretty enough to kiss, begad."

The *moué* she made was too much for his equanimity, and dropping his lantern he made a dash for the wooden steps that led to the gallery, where he was met in full flight by no less a functionary than the chamberlain himself.

"What's to do, what's to do, Dan Ostler, are you mad? and here's three gentlemen here already, one of them a regular customer, and no one about but a lunatic. Nance! Janet! where are you all?"

Nancy appeared at quite a different part of the gallery, her face the presentment of innocence.

"Did you call me, sir?"

"Call you, of course I called you. Go and see whether those gentlemen in the front room want for anything, and you, Dan Ostler, if you've quite recovered, see about saddling three horses, and two of them, at any rate, easy-going."

Thus admonished they departed on their several errands, but not before the girl had managed to make a final *moué* at the ostler, who was precluded

by his position beneath the severe eye of the chamberlain from making any effective reply.

Anthony was conscious of a certain sense of the ludicrous as they emerged from the inn yard, and was relieved to find that the blinds of the house opposite were yet closely drawn. For though Mr Applegate's horse and his own were fairly serviceable roadsters, Mr Critchett, on the other hand, had chosen a very Rosinante of a beast.

"You may smile, you two, as much as you like," quoth he, "but I have not the slightest ambition to 'witch the world with noble horsemanship,' and the ostler has just assured me that this animal is grave, decorous, and not too cheerful."

"Grave, certainly, or near it," laughed the lawyer.

But Mr Critchett was proof against banter, and quite oblivious also to the ribald remarks indulged in by apprentices just beginning to take down the shutters of their masters' shops.

"Now, John," said he, when they had reached the open country, "please remember that your fee-tails and fee-simples and torts and equity and nonsense are to the winds to-day."

"Yes, and your Colophons and Mentz and old Donatus, James, quite forgot, eh?"

"To limbo with them," cried Mr Critchett,

“we’re twenty to-day, John, please remember that, not a day more than twenty.”

The morning was fine, the air crisp, the sky white-flaked on delicate blue, and in the hedge-rows the blush of spring.

“This grown-up business is very silly, isn’t it?” said the lawyer, switching, as he spoke, some nettles by the roadside.

“Silly,” cried the other, “silly; why, it’s sheer lunacy, and if you’ll take my advice, Anthony, you’ll never grow up.”

The young man laughed.

“Of course the joints will get rusty and creak as time goes on, and you’ll find that forty winks is a very desirable thing after dinner, but don’t you ever let your soul get a minute past twenty-one, do you hear?”

After riding for some time the road led them to a small village on the outskirts of the forest. An ancient place, devote to peace, the smoke curling from the chimneys; and the thatched roofs, the whitewashed walls, looked very pleasantly in the morning sun.

“I know this,” cried Mr Applegate, “I’m sure I know it.”

“We came here together, John, years ago; one winter’s afternoon——”

"Yes, yes, I remember, and there's an inn at the further end. Begad, we'll stable our horses there, have a morning draught of Canary, and walk the rest of the way."

The wine ordered, the three sat down in the cool sanded parlour of the "Load o' Hay," and Mr Critchett producing the plan from his pocket, spread it on the table.

"Let me see, now," said he, adjusting his spectacles, "the road seems to end about this very place, and it is here that the hieroglyphic is written."

"Which may be a mere accident," said the lawyer. "In any case we have nothing to go on."

And the three stared rather blankly at the paper.

"What's this place called?" asked Anthony at length.

The effect on Mr Critchett was instant; he sprang from his chair, upset his Canary, then snapped his fingers with delight.

"Eureka! the lad has it, and you and I, John, are muddle-pated rascals."

"You're very mysterious, James. Come, now, what is it?"

"Don't you see? 'L.H.,' 'Load o' Hay,' the very place we're at. Look at the hieroglyphic, man. 'L.H. NE1750. BT.' And this, I take

it, means that seventeen hundred and fifty yards north-east of this door we shall come to 'BT.'"

"And what's BT?"

"Well, if we're all ready, the simplest way is to go and find out."

After traversing a small village green, their path led them directly into the heart of the woodland. Thick undergrowth at first, dense boscage, gorse, blackthorn, bramble, soon however giving place to trees whose tops, pollarded from time immemorial, formed quaint similitudes of human faces. Beneath them lay spread a carpeting of leaves, many summers' pride, with the sun dappling their poor dry bones and the soft wind stirring them.

The seventeen hundred and fifty paces brought them to an open space in the woods, a small meadow, through which a stream meandered, and here, at the foot of a great beech tree that overhung an angle in the stream, they sat down to rest. On one side a deep pool, where the water scarce stirred beneath its overhanging cliff, on the other a bed of gravel, miniature rapids, where it leapt and laughed and talked.

"Just like this, John, wasn't it, when we were lads?"

"Yes, yes," cried the lawyer, "not a whit changed that I can see; and don't you remember we sailed paper boats down here one afternoon?"

"So we did, so we did, and it was another day like this, in spring, and my boat won, I remember."

"No, no, mine won; yours was stopped, if you recollect—why, it was under that very bank there."

"I'm sure you're wrong, John, certain of it; my boat had a blotch of ink on it."

"Come now, James, that was my boat."

Anthony broke into laughter.

"Why not race it over again?" said he.

"The very thing," cried Mr Appleyard delightedly, "mine against yours, James, for a cup of sack."

Taking a letter from his pocket he tore it in half and immediately commenced to put his resolution into practice.

"There, that's it—no—my hand hath lost its cunning somewhat. Ah! this edge goes over that, so. It's a client's letter, too, a fellow that's for ever moving his neighbour's landmark—the most notorious, litigious rascal in Wrenford. Serve him right, and here's his nonsense put to use at last."

So saying, Mr Applegate held up for the admiration of his companions two paper boats, rather lopsided, it is true, but which, nevertheless, seemed to afford him the most unspeakable satisfaction.

"Now then, James, we'll settle this question once and for all, you take the first pick—so—and we'll start at that willow yonder and end at the big tree where we've been sitting."

Anthony could not forbear laughing at their enthusiasm, and 'twas very pleasant to watch their boyish excitement at the varying fortunes of the boats. "Mine's in front." "No, mine now." "Confound that twig, she's got hold of mine—no, she's off." "Mine's in the shallows; on the rocks, begad. Hurrah! she's twisted out of it," till finally the boats settled the business in a very tactful manner by coming together in the deep pool by the overhanging bank and refusing to budge an inch further.

"Why, they did that before," cried the lawyer, "I remember now."

"So they did, John, so they did, forty years since."

Meanwhile the object of their expedition had been quite forgotten, till Mr Applegate suddenly pulled out his watch.

"Bless my soul, it's two o'clock, and Anthony must think we're in our dotage. Where's that plan, James? Ah! that's it. Now, we've got as far as 1750 yards north-east, and as LH stood for the 'Load o' Hay,' BT, by the same token, ought

to mean big tree or beech tree, or something of the kind, and the very one we're seated against, I take it."

"Yes, that must be it," cried Mr Critchett, "and our next move is one and a half miles north, when we shall come to 'L,' whatever that may be. Come, let's shog."

The brook passed, their way led them up a long hill where silver birches abounded, and where last year's bracken stood in many places breast-high; then came groves of beech trees, their grey stems rising like columns in a cathedral, tall and straight and solemn. Brown leaves and crackling beech-mast, vistas of silent loveliness where the sunlight played, the calm and venerable woods.

"Sound seems almost an affront here," said Mr Critchett in low tones. And he voiced the thoughts of his companions.

But presently there came more open spaces, where dwarfed oak and gorse and fern strove for the mastery, and then some marish ground, with clumps of grass and pools, dank with leaves. Meanwhile the sky had clouded over, and the dark masses gathering in the west, the woods grew strange and sombre.

"Here an end to the mile and a half," cried Anthony, who had been counting the steps.

"And here the 'L'—the lake," said Mr Critchett.

They had come to the banks of a pond where the water stood black and stagnant, and weeds trailed on the surface; one or two islands there were, with clusters of stunted thorn, and on the further side, situated on a jutting piece of land, a large dead oak.

"'L,' lake, yes," said Mr Applegate, "what next? 'TonP,' what can that mean? Tree on—tree on——"

"Tree on promontory, over there," suggested Anthony.

"The very thing, the very thing. Ah! we'll soon get to the heart of this business now."

Making their way round the pond to the tree in question, they stood there for some minutes in silence. A feeling of depression possessed them, of time and place and circumstance; the driving clouds, dark woods, melancholy lake, and the stillness unbroken, save for an occasional spatter of rain and the low uneasy moaning of the wind.

"It must have been at night he came here," whispered Anthony, "and alone, and he must have listened to every sound."

And they glanced uneasily over their shoulders, for it seemed as if the spirit of the dead man were

brooding there, in the darkening woods and in the wind.

"This will never do," said the lawyer at length, "we shall be benighted else. T on P—tree on promontory, that seems obvious; now, the only riddle left is this 'R.R.,' which might stand for 'roots,' these roots, we'll presume."

All three now set to work with a will, scraping away the leaves at the foot of the great oak, a task which took them longer than they expected, for the accumulation was deep.

Suddenly Anthony gave a cry.

"There's something here," said he.

"What is it, what is it?"

The excitement of the search was upon them.

Anthony cleared away the leaves and disclosed a rusty ring firmly imbedded in the ground, and pull as he might there was no moving it.

"So this is what the 'R.R.' means," said Mr Applegate, "'ring—roots'; but it must be a secret worth having that requires such elaborate concealment."

Scraping away the mould, Anthony found that it was attached to a heavy lid, which he managed, after some difficulty, to prize open. A small cavity lay beneath, lined with wood, and at the bottom of this an iron box.

"There is nothing else but leaves," said he.

"Any key?" asked the lawyer.

"No; nothing."

The box, a small and shallow one, though strongly bound by bands of iron, was worn in some places to the thinness of paper. But the lock itself was unimpaired, and resisted all their efforts to burst it open.

"We shall have to wait till we get home after all, then," said Mr Critchett.

"Yes, and perhaps it will be just as well," returned the lawyer drily; "look over there."



CHAPTER XIV.

A LOYAL TOAST.

A MAN, half hidden by intervening bush, stood staring at them from the further side of the lake, but the light was too dim and the distance too great to enable them to see his face very clearly. Tall he was, that was all they could be certain about, for the moment he saw them looking at him he turned and disappeared precipitately into the wood.

"Now, that's that apothecary fellow again," cried the lawyer, "and the devil's in it if we can't come out for a walk without being shadowed. What! have we the secret of the El Dorado, damn 'em."

"It's Anthony's money they're after," said Mr Critchett.

"Tut, tut, Anthony's money; they can't run away with acres."

"But they might run away with us."

"Let them try it," said the young man, flourishing his cudgel, "and here a stout oaken lawyer for them anyway."

The day was fast drawing to its end, twilight closing in, and the rain, that hitherto had only come in whips and gusts, now began to fall in earnest. Every moment their path grew darker and more difficult to find, and very mournfully sounded the sighing of the wind and the patter of drops. To crown all, they thought they heard footsteps from time to time among the dead leaves, now at a distance, now at their very elbow as it seemed.

Suddenly Anthony stepped swiftly aside towards the trunk of a large beech tree.

"I could have sworn I heard somebody."

"And I too," said Mr Critchett.

"He shall have a crack on the sconce," cried Anthony.

And thereafter they walked on for some time in silence, making their way but slowly on account of the unevenness of the ground, and stumbling often over hidden roots or wading knee-deep through the drifts of leaves.

"A deuce of a place in this light," muttered the lawyer.

They had been retracing their footsteps as far as possible, and at length arrived once more at the brook and the open space. The rain had ceased, but the pattering from the trees still continued, and the moon, struggling for mastery in a mass of cloud, threw monstrous shadows of the trees. Here, at the foot of the great beech, they stood for some time in silence, peering into the dark recesses of the forest and listening to the music that the brook made and the eerie sougling of the wind.

Suddenly there was a stampede of deer close at hand.

"Begad," cried Mr Applegate, wiping his forehead, "this confounded wood is a nerve-racking place, and the sooner we're out of it the better. Come, let us be going. S.W. by compass it is. So."

"And if anybody is watching us or following us," said Anthony in a loud and deliberate voice, "he had better look to himself."

The remainder of the journey however was passed without further adventure, and mounting again at the "Load o' Hay" the distance to London was soon accomplished.

"You must distinctly understand," said Mr Critchett as he opened the door of his house with a strange mixture of trepidation and bravado,

"you must distinctly understand, both of you, that I will not and cannot be responsible for Bridget."

"Is that you, sir?"

"Yes, Bridget."

"Of course the supper is cold, sir."

"Never mind, Bridget, never mind. There is a good fire, I see, and it couldn't be helped."

So saying Mr Critchett began pulling the chairs towards the hearth and stirring the logs to a blaze, but it was of no avail.

"The steak is as cold as clat," said she, "the vegetables too, and of course the oven can't be kept going all night."

"All right, it doesn't matter, it's all right."

"I think you'll find, sir," returned Bridget firmly, "that it's not all right and that it does matter. Supper was ordered for eight—supper for three, and supper was ready by eight—supper for three. Now it is nine."

Mr Critchett maintained a diplomatic silence; long experience had taught him that resistance only made the final rout and defeat more overwhelming.

"And this is the result," she continued, suddenly whipping the cover from the dish, "this is the result; but certainly not my fault."

“Of course not, Bridget, of course not; but we can manage very well on bread and cheese to-night, and—er—the steak can be cooked again to-morrow.”

Probably, as far as the everyday usages of life were concerned, Mr Critchett was the most impracticable person in London. The present was mere dream-stuff, the past the only reality, and fortunate indeed was he in having at hand one whose cast of mind was so decidedly the reverse. “Paradoxical as it may seem,” he would say, “the only fault I have to find with Bridget is her faultlessness. Bridget never makes a mistake, never errs, and this despite the fact of declaring every Sunday at that d——d conventicle of hers that she is simply riddled through and through with original sin. It is a failing incident to practical people; they are apt to assume airs of consequence, and nothing will ever convince them that it is they and not the dreamers that are ephemeral. A love-song of Suckling remains, Gustavus and his legions pass away; where were Mæcenæ now but for the patronage of Horace, and how many Kings and Captains, think you, stout as Achilles, have marched into the inane? Surely it is the dreamers that rule the world.”

Visitors being present this evening Bridget con-

fined her remarks within reasonable limits, promising herself however a larger discourse on the morrow. Beginning with a slight sketch of her past life, she went on to give in some detail an account of her services with Mr Critchett, and in especial the difficulty she experienced in keeping any order in a house where unpunctuality and untidiness were of such daily and hourly occurrence. Enlarging on this theme and addressing her remarks, as was her invariable custom, to a large oaken press near the fireplace, she at length finished her peroration by stating, in the clearest and most emphatic words possible, that she at any rate had nothing to reproach herself with, that she as far as she knew had always striven to do her duty, and was fully determined to continue to do so, even if London Bridge itself were washed away and every house in the City knocked to pieces by the Dutch, or circumstances of the like trying character; but if, on the other hand, she were misunderstood, as was most likely the case—this being a world of sin and sorrow and trials and crosses and general discomfort,—if, on the other hand, it should be her fate to have her motives misunderstood by certain persons, or her conduct called in question, that such persons had the remedy in their own hands, and that for her part

she had fully made up her mind that it would be only after she was dead and gone that her character would be appreciated in its true light, and that only under these melancholy conditions would certain persons fully realise how they had behaved and what they had lost.

"The mortality stage is the last stage," said Mr Critchett when she had gone, "and I always experience the same kind of relief that the congregation does at the twenty-first and lastly."

"But why don't you take her at her word and give her notice, James?"

Mr Critchett was at the fireplace coaxing the logs to a blaze.

"I have, John, dozens of times—we give each other notice once a week."

"Well?"

"Well, nothing happens, she doesn't go; and, mind you, John, I should feel quite lost without her—an invaluable woman, John."

"She must be," returned the lawyer, who was making a vigorous attack on the iron box with hammer and chisel.

"I have some keys upstairs," said Anthony. "I brought them from home."

"Fetch them by all means then, for devil a bit of an impression can I make here."

On the landing outside his room Anthony was met by the apprentice.

"Hullo! anything wrong?" he asked, somewhat surprised.

"I came to get a bodkin for Mistress Bridget," murmured the lad.

"Well, they're none in my bedroom, that's certain," laughed Anthony.

The keys were caked in rust: they had hung from time immemorial in old Simon Rutherford's laboratory, and, thinking them of no importance, it was only a chance that Anthony had brought them to London. One in especial attracted Mr Applegate's attention, and this, with a little oil and persuasion, at once turned the catch.

The lawyer was seated while Mr Critchett and Anthony stood peering over his shoulder, and, though they would have been hard put to it for a reason, all three experienced a similar sense of disappointment. The precautions taken to conceal the box had been so elaborate and the quest so far flung, that nothing short of palpable treasure, treasure that they could see and realise, could possibly have satisfied their expectations.

"It's only a parchment and another paper," said Mr Critchett ruefully.

And then all three laughed at the anti-climax.

"I don't know what we expected," said the lawyer. "Potosi it must have been at the very least."

The package was elaborately wrapped in several sheets of oiled paper, and addressed, "To my beloved ward, Anthony Rutherford," while beneath this was written, in thick black lettering, the legend, "Remember Epimetheus."

"Anthony, it is for you to take the warning or not," said the lawyer at length.

"I don't think I've strength of mind enough to resist," returned the other slowly.

It was a small sheet of calfskin, closely written on one side, while the other was blackened over as if with ink.

"It is for you to read, Anthony."

"No, no, you are my lawyer, and you, Mr Critchett, my friend. I have no secrets."

Mr Applegate turned his chair round and put his feet on the fender.

"Well, as you will, and in any case I suppose it's nothing but a mare's nest, the seven spheres, the ruling passion."

He adjusted his spectacles and began to examine the writing with great care.

"Yes, yes, as I thought," said he at length. "Here are triangles and circles and signs of the Zodiac, mixed with some very villainous Latin.

Come, I can make nothing of this jargon and you are an expert."

"Here's nothing very wonderful," said Anthony, "the magisterium of course, but that only to ciba-tion, and I'm convinced that my poor guardian thought he was on the very eve of projection."

"But what's this, here on the blackened side?" exclaimed Mr Critchett in a startled voice.

And as they gazed characters gradually formed themselves, livid red at first then brighter and brighter, till finally the whole of the reverse was covered with writing.

"It's the heat of the fire that has brought it out," said Anthony. "Secret ink—I should have thought of that."

He read it twice very carefully, and then handed it on to the others.

"What do you think of it?" he asked.

Mr Applegate's face was very pale, and his hand trembled a little as he poured out three glasses of wine.

"A toast at any rate," said he. "Gentlemen, the King!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE ACTIVITIES OF PETER.

CAPTAIN PENTREITH'S face was gloomy, his brows knitted, as he sat lost in thought.

"Father," said she timidly, "is anything amiss? You have looked so sad of late."

She was seated opposite to him, Dorothy Pentreith, and the sunlight through the lattice turned her fair hair to an aureola of light. His face smoothed as he looked across at her, and a gleam leapt to his eyes—frank admiration.

"How can I be sad, little one, and you near me?" said he, wistfully almost.

Ever since his wife's death the thought and image of this daughter of his had been the one good influence in a sombre life. She, at any rate, this "Flower of Gracious Street," as he was wont to style her, she, at any rate, should have good care and tenderness against a dark-browed world.

"Sir Rupert Bligh,—have you seen him lately?" he asked suddenly.

No, she had not; he had called once or twice—she had forgotten how often,—but she had not been in as it happened.

He looked at her keenly.

"You mean 'in' to him?"

"Yes."

There was silence between them for some moments, she busy with lace fichu, he still watching her with the same intentness.

"You don't like him, then?" he asked.

"I neither like nor dislike him as far as I know," said she.

The answer was with careful carelessness, and much as Captain Pentreith might in general pique himself on his penetration, he could make no guess now as to what lay hidden beneath those downcast eyes. Ambitious he was,—and Sir Rupert Bligh was of an ancient family,—but he had long since made up his mind that he would never attempt to influence, much less coerce, her inclinations.

"Well, well, child, you are your own mistress—always. But I do not like to see how wan my little flower has grown of late."

He rose and went to where she was seated, and turned her face to the light.

"What lilies of cheeks ! it makes my heart ache. And what have become of the roses, child ?"

"Perhaps I haven't felt quite — quite so well lately."

"Come, come, we can't have this," said he hastily, "and London grown so sickly of late ; we must have you down to your Aunt Mulliner's,— what do you say ?"

"Oh ! I'd rather not go away just now, there is so much to do ; the house——"

"Will lose every bit of its sunshine," said he, taking her face between his great brown hands, "but we must put up with that, little one ; besides, it is not far, and I can ride over and see you every week."

Left to himself, the bright look which always came when speaking to his daughter quickly faded from his face as he sat there, glooming over the fire. The troubles with the Dutch had not only severely handicapped all business on 'Change, and resulted in loss for him personally, but the same unsettled condition of public affairs had been the determining factor in the failure of his secret embassy to France. For Louis XIV. and his ambitions the disunion of Europe was of the last importance, but much as he might wish to see the face of Protestantism ground to the dust in England, as in his own country, the times were hardly ripe

for aid to be given to either side in the struggle that was toward. Yet money must be had, and Charles was nearly come to the end of his tether. The Navy starved, the Castlemaine insatiable, his very lackeys unpaid, and in his endeavours to govern without a Parliament, "a company of fellows," as he complained, "who wanted to examine himself and his ministers and his accounts," money was the one thing needful. And the mission had failed, quite failed, and though both Louis and his minister Colbert were profuse in their professions of friendship, not a tester was to be had. Failed, and the missionary discredited, for though Captain Pentreith had sent formal notice immediately on his return to London, he had now been at home several weeks, and yet there had come no summons to Court.

"And I could have chiaused Louis so easily through that Father Confessor of his," thought he, "but Colbert, the Scotch blood in the man, damn it, I had clean forgot."

His position was difficult—dangerous even. He had studied Charles far too closely to have any doubts of his egoism, and was one of the few who realised the capacity hidden behind that mask of Hedonism. The roué, the idler, the man of wit and pleasure,—these were sufficiently obvious, and

though real and integral parts of a complex personality, served very efficiently to hide the intellect beneath—keen, cold, passionless, quite self-centred.

And the mission had failed, and Charles' resentment must be deep indeed that could make him ignore a man, the sole depository of so damaging a secret.

"And here the danger," thought the Captain, "but if I am to break over the business, somebody will have to smoke for it."

"There's a young man downstairs says he must see you, sir," said Mary, opening the door at that moment.

"His hair—is it very rough?"

This description proved correct, and it was not long before Peter, Mr Critchett's apprentice, appeared at the doorway.

"Sit down," said the Captain.

The youth took a chair at the extreme end of the room and fidgeted uneasily with his cap. Neither did it serve to reassure him when he saw the other very deliberately lock and double-lock the door.

"You have news for me—at last."

"Yes."

"Well, come here by the fire, then."

And, settling himself with his back to the light,

Captain Pentreith hardly took his eyes from the lad's face.

"Now, then, sirrah, and the truth."

"I'll tell you the truth, sir, indeed I will, every word of it."

"Yes, I think you had better."

"They all went away the other day, sir, for the whole day, Mr Critchett and the young man and the lawyer, and didn't get home till late in the evening."

"Where had they been to?"

"I don't know. I couldn't find out."

"Any mud on their boots next morning?"

The lad stared.

"Yes, sir, and leaves too."

"Well, go on."

"And after they had had supper and when Bridget was gone to bed, I watched them through the keyhole. They had a small iron box on the table, and in it was a parchment with writing on one side and all black like ink on the other."

"Well."

"The young man read the writing, and they all seemed disappointed."

"Could you hear?"

"Yes, but all nonsense about 'House of Life'

and 'Sulphur' and 'Cibation' and 'Mercury,' like an old book Mr Critchett has in the shop."

"Is that all you have to tell me?"

"No, sir, because while he was reading, letters came out on the black side; they said the heat made them come out—like blood the writing looked."

"And what was this writing about?"

"I don't know; they didn't read it out loud."

Captain Pentreith gave a gesture of impatience.

"But couldn't you get hold of it?"

"No, sir; Mr Critchett locked it up in his safe, but two days afterwards Mr Anthony made a copy, and—and, here it is, with another paper I found as well."

Captain Pentreith took them to the window, and his mouth tightened a little as he read.

"I found this in Mr Anthony's room, but the real one they locked up in the safe, sir, indeed they did."

"Well, you must do your utmost to get it for me. And the tall man?"

"I saw him in the street again, sir, the day after they had been away, and he told me that he would have the boat waiting when the tide served, and that I was to lower the iron box——"

"How did he hear about the iron box?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Well, go on."

"That I was to lower the iron box when all was clear, so that they could get it safely on board ship at once."

"Well?"

"The boat has been there most nights, sir, and gone away again."

Captain Pentreith looked at the lad for some moments without speaking.

"Your tale limps so much that it's probably true," said he at length, "but if," and here he rose from his seat and, kneeling down, put his face within six inches of that of the terrified lad, "if you've been playing me false, Peter, I'll make the tortures of Spain child's play to what I'll——"

"Indeed, sir, indeed it's true, every word of it."

"Well, I sincerely hope on your own account that it is. For the rest, mind shop and obey your master. He's a man I have a very great respect for. Now go!"

Captain Pentreith relocked the door, then set to reading the papers again, word by word, syllable by syllable.

"This money bill signed by Charles is clear enough, and explains Sir Rupert's business down at Wrenford, while this one," a wave of exultation

passed over his dark face, "the gods are on my side this morning, and, if true, then a coil here for England! Ayscough—but what a deep dog—no wonder he was a-weary of the *Espiritu Santo*. Questionings of conscience,—a devil's ship—the very pitch in the seams crying to God—yet never a more pitiless ruffian when the blood was up."

He threw another log on the fire, and watched it as it caught and blazed. There was a half-smile on his face, enigmatic, unpleasant.

"I wonder if any but Ayscough escaped; and if not—how strange to see the wide-eyed fish staring at their faces; and the state-room—what clammy, soft things are there now."

He passed his hands over his eyes as if to shut out some atrocious memory.

"Bah! this good fortune has unnerved me; I am not myself. It was necessary, inevitable—fiends, not men—better so, under hatches."

He paced the room, up and down, up and down, the muscles of his sombre face as bands, the brows almost hiding the fierce eyes.

"What's wrong with me?—and this sunshine, too—but not for them, not for them—except a little perhaps, shimmering in the 'tween decks—that damned Irisher, torn long since, crabs—God! God! what a horror in that green lagoon!"

He walked unsteadily about the room like one dazed, till startled by a footstep.

“Dorothy, what is it?”

She looked at him, shrinking as she did so.

“You are ill, father.”

“It is nothing—I have business—I must go out now.”

But she sat down trembling when he had gone, and as dusk came on that same evening became quite nervous, for the face was not the face of her father.

CHAPTER XVI.

SOME RECOLLECTIONS OF LAVERICK.

CAPTAIN PENTREITH kept to the less frequented streets till he quite recovered his habitual composure, and gradually the horror in his face gave place to a look of triumph. The secret that had come into his possession that morning was of infinitely greater importance than he had ever anticipated, and he could not imagine why Simon Rutherford or "Ayscough"—by which name he had formerly known him—had not made greater use of such an influence.

"But he found 'Religion' it seems, with a mind to make the best of both worlds, eh!—always a calculating villain—and the obsession of alchemy—strange."

Though he hugged himself with the thought of the writing in his pocket and the power it gave,

he was fully conscious there were others in the secret, and that to make it effective for his own purposes would require most delicate handling. To appear directly in the matter would, at any rate for the present, be unwise, and he was forced though reluctantly to fall back upon the good offices of Lady Castlemaine.—*Varium et mutabile*—the aphorism had early burnt itself into his brain, and long since had he learnt the wisdom, the necessity almost, of eliminating femininity from any long-continued line of action. Inconsistent even in inconsistency, the ordinary laws of cause and effect do not apply—or rather, and more philosophically, the same causes produce differing effects according as they act on the one sex or the other. Though “cast in the same mould,” as Montaigne insists, the differences though small are so numerous and subtle that complete reciprocal knowledge must for ever remain impossible. Adam gazing wonderingly at Eve, spellbound—we too have been gazing ever since, the spell still unbroken.

Arriving on 'Change that afternoon Captain Pentreith found a scene of strange excitement. Rumour was rife of a great capture of English merchantmen by Dutch privateers, and many and loud were the complaints of the Navy and its management. Where did all the money go to?

Why was it that stores and victuals were always wanting and the seamen clamouring for their pay? And though the answers to these questions were sufficiently obvious it was only here and there that they were voiced.

"Two or three more of these Barbara Villiers," said one, "would make the wealth of Lombard Street look silly."

And there was a stern murmur of approval from those around: the speaker had voiced the thoughts of all.

"Why, here comes Captain Pentreith, and perhaps with news," said Sheriff Meynell.

"One of the lucky ones he," grumbled Bakewell, who had been badly hit; "why, I bought his liabilities late yesterday, being assured of their safety."

"Ah! one cannot always have the winning chance," said Pentreith, who that moment strolled up, "the sea is a devourer, Bakewell."

And he smiled grimly to himself as he thought of Lady Castlemaine's surprising faculty for early information.

"The fact is, we must have our Captain at sea again," laughed Meynell, "to drub those insolent Mynheers."

"But I'm unbreathed of late," returned the other gravely, "and grown asthmatical and timid, and

much prefer your city way of reaping the profit while others do the work."

"There is gross mismanagement," cried Bakewell, "for the rakehells at Court——"

"Are perfectly willing at any rate to risk their necks, while these"—Captain Pentreith looked round him with a grim smile,—"damn it, why should these lie always easy in their beds?"

Few there were at any time anxious to bandy words with the formidable Captain, and his looks at the present moment boding anything but complacence, the crowd that had gathered round in the hope of news quickly melted. Left alone he was making his way to where the lists of ships in dock, their freights and date of convoy, were posted up, when he felt himself pulled lightly by the elbow.

"Ah! Master Laverick, it is you?"

"I have news."

"Good, I hope; but let us come to this stone seat here where it is quieter and out of the way."

"I followed them to Epping——" began Laverick.

"Followed whom?"

"The young man, the lawyer, the bookseller, followed them through the forest to a certain place, hard by a lake, where they dug up a small iron box."

"Well."

“Judging by the care they took it was evidently of the utmost importance, so hardly left them out of my sight till safely home.”

The other glanced at him swiftly.

“But did you get it?” he asked.

“Not yet, it’s by no means easy ; but two men I have watching below when the tide serves.”

“You have taken a great deal of trouble, Master Laverick.”

“I am anxious to serve you.”

“For which I must thank you,” returned the other gravely.

“And, thinking it would be easier with an accomplice within doors, I have managed to get into the good graces of an apprentice, though a dull dog he is at his best. However, there was no help for it, the only other person in the place being the housekeeper herself, a harsh-faced fanatical woman much immersed in the spiritual ministrations of one Tribulation Bashem of Fanchurch Street.”

“I fancy I have seen the woman,” said Captain Pentreith, “and certainly she struck me as being the very last person in London I should care to cajole.”

Master Laverick smiled.

“I have played many parts in my time” said he, —“even as you, doubtless.”

The other looked at him steadily for some moments.

“I was always dull in matters of humour, Master Laverick, and impatient withal. I am a plain man and must deal plainly. Now let me call to your remembrance for a moment a certain evening spent in a tavern many miles away, where there was company, a landlord, a young blood of the town, a passenger newly come from sea, and a certain apothecary. A very pleasant evening it was, and the liquor excellent.”

The listener's face had assumed a wooden look, quite expressionless.

“Further, that the conviviality was marred towards the end by the sudden illness of a Mr Simon Rutherford well known in the village, and that the apothecary, with that selflessness characteristic of the profession, immediately proffered his services. You remember all this, I fancy, and also that, as good hap would have it, the services of Dr Prettyman of London, a physician of note, who happened to be passenger in the ship then in port, were also available.

He paused as if for a reply, but the other made no sign.

“And now, Master Laverick,” he went on, “would it surprise you to learn that I have always

considered acting as one of my accomplishments, and that this Dr Prettyman and myself were one and the same."

"You!" cried the other, quite unable to suppress his astonishment.

"Ah! I thought you couldn't have forgotten,—a notable evening that. And how did you like being turned out of the room, and your treatment of the case pooh-poohed?"

His listener had regained his composure and said nothing; but Captain Pentreith broke into laughter, very genuine laughter, rare enough with him.

"But, hark ye, Master Laverick, parables aside, I saw through your disguise easily enough, and naturally made it my business to ferret out its meaning. Guessing that you were staying in the village for the express purpose of finding out if certain papers were to be sent by sea—a surmise which, though I didn't know it at the time, has since proved correct—I thought it policy on your arrival in London to commission you to obtain for me the very papers you were at so much pains to obtain for yourself. You have a certain reputation for business matters requiring secrecy, and I thought that such a course was the readiest way of allaying

any suspicions you might have that I guessed your own private designs. So far so good, and frankly I could not help but admire you for the self-command you displayed on entering the inn. I knew that I had to deal with one subtle almost to a fault, and I think you must agree with me that my apparent openness in the matter was the finest card I could have played."

Again he paused, but nothing was to be gathered from the listener's face.

"To complicate matters," continued the Captain, "this young blood that led you such a dance, Sir Rupert Bligh, has also his designs on the papers, having got it firmly fixed in his head that Mr Simon Rutherford was in possession of the great arcanum. Altogether a very pretty three-cornered game, and I'm sorry it's finished."

The other glanced searchingly at him for a moment, then dropped his eyes.

"Yes, Master Laverick, I said 'finished'; the papers are in my pocket."

The listener made an involuntary movement, and his face became very pale. Then he recovered himself with an effort.

"Ah! well, Captain Pentreith, I am sorry that my services have been of no avail in this matter,

but perhaps better fortune will attend me in the future. I need hardly remind you that I have been put to some charges in the business."

The other looked at him curiously. "You will send in an account," said he at length.

"Oh! yes, there will be an account. But while on the subject of reminiscences, might I be permitted——"

He rose and stretched himself, regarding the Captain the while in a kind of whimsical way the latter could by no means fathom.

"I am in no immediate hurry, Master Laverick."

"Well, well, the *mise en scène* in this instance is very different to yours, and instead of a comfortable tavern, with blazing hearth, congenial company, and liquor of the best, we have the sea, silent, stagnant, sinister, with the sky above as brass, and the sun a baleful splendour. A ship there is with sails lifeless, pitch swelling in the seams, the last drop of water drunk, not a man that can handle rope, and half already gone to their account."

"Quite a talent for the picturesque," said Captain Pentreith.

"Ah! I do not bore you then. But enter now another ship, at evening, black-barred and fairy-like against the setting sun, and hope springs up

as they drag themselves, wan figures, to the bulwarks, to stare with starting eyes; hope at first, fast rising to exaltation when gentle cats-paws fan the stranger slowly towards them. But they might as well have met the Death Ship, Captain, more mercy would they have found; for a puff of smoke, a shot, the black flag floating from the stranger's peak, and soon—but I grow tedious."

He paused a moment, but the other made no sign.

"‘No prey no pay,’—‘Dead men don't bite,’—the rules are simple. I remember hearing just such another story in an inn once, and am told that such passages are far from uncommon. Resistance of course there was none, the sea-wolves had an easy victory, and of all that ship's company only a boy survived, taken for powder-monkey, and never like to blab."

Again he paused, eyeing his listener with half-closed eyes.

"But I tire you; I will be brief. Fourteen months passed, and then the Captain—one Batt by name—who had served with Rupert as they say, becoming a-weary of the sea and his companions both, took the opportunity afforded one night by a carousal among these gentlemen of fortune to scuttle the ship and make away with the pick of


the booty. Who escaped I never learned, except one, Ayscough by name, probably in the captain's plot, and this same lad, who, happening to be on shore that day, escaped into the woods, and after many surprising adventures eventually found his way to England."

"This is a very entertaining story of yours, Master Laverick, but time flies——"

"Ah, well, I have finished; but it has struck me as a coincidence that Ayscough had another name—Rutherford, and Batt another name, the same as your own, and—would it surprise you to learn that I was the lad?"

Captain Pentreith looked him squarely in the face for some moments.

"No, Master Laverick," said he at length, and speaking very slowly; "no, I don't think it would surprise me. But—well, you know, it may be a very serious thing for you."



CHAPTER XVII.

CONCERNING A *RENCONTRE*.

It often happened that my Lady Castlemaine was accompanied by her tire-woman when she drove forth to take the air. As a companion partly ; again, as a subject for satire ; principally perhaps as a foil for her own extravagant beauty. Another reason there was, strange as it may seem, and even Barbara Villiers had to bow to the conventions to this extent, that an occasional chaperone was desirable. For all these requirements Mistress Morris was well suited, being sedate in manner, simple in dress, a good listener, and, despite the rebuffs to which she was daily subjected, entirely devoted to my lady.

And she had at the present time need of all her patience, for the Castlemaine's temper, never very conciliatory, still continued to be sorely tried by the successes of Mistress Stewart, and the ill-

humour and spite and pent-up bitterness consequent thereon still continued to be wreaked on her unfortunate dependants. Mistress Stewart—you can see her pretty face on every penny to this day,—Mistress Stewart, with her sweet eyes and soft voice; Mistress Stewart with her little Roman nose and *taille* and witcheries and fascinations that had made the Court run mad—is it to be wondered at that Madame Castlemaine's household were at one with their mistress in this matter, and wished her very heartily at the devil?

“Is Jervis ready, Morris?”

Jervis was my lady's coachman, long-suffering and of great stolidity.

“You said that you didn't intend to drive out, madame.”

“And why not, pray?”

“Captain Pentreith is to wait on you at four.”

But my lady had changed her mind, and would take the air this fine afternoon, and if people wished to see her they must wait, and she did not intend to dance to anybody's piping, Captain Pentreith or other.

“And tell Jervis the new coach,” said she.

Now this was one of the few triumphs my Lady Castlemaine had enjoyed of late. For one day her rival appeared in a new carriage of glass and green

and gold, made in Paris, it was said, and a present from the Duke of York. But my lady, electing to believe that this was mere rumour, and that it was Charles himself who had bought and paid for it, so hectored that unfortunate gentleman that not many days had passed before she also appeared in a new coach of glass and green and gold, but finer far than that of her rival, and hung moreover so curiously on springs that it immediately set the fashion. Many a tear did this cost the little Stewart, many a fit of ill-humour, till finally, in a burst of petulance one day, the present was returned. It was on this occasion that my Lady Castlemaine had the severest attack of hysteria that Morris remembered, superinduced by immoderate laughter at the receipt of the news.

The Park was in the fulness of spring, dainty greens, dappling sunlight, and a shower occurring earlier in the day had given a freshness and a delicacy to the air. Many were the people gathered there, driving or riding or on foot, much bravery and extravagance of costume, youth and laughter and love-making and the *joie de vivre*, and many were the glances of admiration or curiosity or envy bestowed on my lady as she sat there languorously indifferent.

"Every one wears patches now, Morris, even to the very citizens' wives; I shall leave it off."

"A very pretty fashion, I think, madame."

"Pretty or not, I shall leave it off, and time enough, too, when it gets past Temple Bar. Why, there was that ridiculous woman, the wife of Alderman Backewell, or Bakewell, or whatever his name is, driving in the Park the other day with half-a-dozen patches on her face as large as shillings. It's curious how these people overdo things."

"But her husband is a great money man, they say."

"Yes, so I've heard; but who's that over there, under that tree, with Sir Rupert Bligh?"

Now Morris was a notable gossip, and little of the floating news or scandal of the Court failed to find its way to my lady's boudoir.

"That must be young Rutherford that came from the country, and both he and Sir Rupert mad, they say, after Captain Pentreith's pretty daughter."

"But they seem friendly enough."

"It's only 'seeming' by all accounts; they won't leave one another for the very good reason that each is frightened his rival might gain an advantage."

"Is she so great a beauty then?"

"The 'Flower of Gracious Street' they call her."

My lady laughed.

"Quite a pastoral, Morris, and should be to an accompaniment of pipe and tabor, but when Corydon comes a-wooing our wicked courtier will stand little or no chance, I'm afraid. Besides, the young man's personable enough and shows little of the rustic in his dress. We must have him at the Masque."

"He's rich too, they say, and there's some mystery about him."

"'Rich' and a 'mystery.' Oh, quite irresistible! But what mystery?" she added sharply.

"He lodges with Mr Critchett, the bookseller, on London Bridge."

"But where does he come from?"

"The west country, I heard; and I think the name of the place is Wrenford."

"Wrenford!" exclaimed her mistress.

The other looked up in surprise, but my lady's face had become immobile.

"Anything else, Morris?"

"And they say, though young he is very learned, and can cast nativities and horoscopes, and that even Mr Lilly, the astrologer, has been to see him. I heard also——"

The words died upon her lips, for approaching them along the drive were two on horseback,—Miss Stewart and the King. A long feather drooped from her hat, and the fair hair, blown about her cheeks, half hid the blushes as she listened to Charles, bending towards her. Instinctively Morris turned to her mistress and could not help but be filled with admiration to see her face suffused in smiles as she bowed acknowledgment to the King's cold salute. Smiles so natural that they must have deceived all that were witness to the *rencontre*, smiles that brought the hard lines to Charles' face and caused the flush of pleasure on the Stewart's cheeks to die into nothingness.

My lady laughed lilyingly.

"Could any at the Duke's Theatre have done it better?" she cried. "Now confess, Morris, I should have been the actress of them all."

"It had an effect, madame."

"She turned as white as paper, did you notice?"

"But the King looked very angry, madame."

"Pshaw! What care I? The thing that really frets me—I care not who knows it—to be out-faced by such a brainless creature,—she prattles like a child of twelve."

“But the King——”

“Now, now, Morris, I shall begin to think you’re as dull as she is; I tell you she won’t last a twelvemonth.”

Morris looked very doubtful.

“They say that——”

“Oh! they say a lot of things and can always find fools to believe them, but I tell you I’ll have her from Court within a twelvemonth.”

Her companion said nothing; there was that in my lady’s manner that warned her to silence.

“Yes, less than a twelvemonth—I’ll marry her.”

“I—I don’t understand.”

“How dull you are! I’ll marry her to some fool lord and she won’t stay very long at the Court after that.”

“But your ladyship’s husband——” began Morris, then stopped in confusion.

“Really, I ought to be angry, I suppose,” laughed the other, “but every one knows what the Earl of Castlemaine was and is; and besides, I have never had the slightest intention of leaving Court. This Stewart, though, she shall marry a great dull lord, jealous as Sir John Denham, one that will keep her mewed up in some melancholy seat, there to eat her heart out

over children and jams and fowls and possets and peasantry."

"Perhaps it would suit her," laughed Morris.

"She's empty-headed enough for anything," said my lady, "and I can imagine her coming up to London once every ten years or so to kiss the hand of Majesty, she and her lord, in a fat coach with six fat horses and fat driver and fat footmen, all reared on the estate. And there will be gaping lines of hedges and hoydens, and my lord's periwig will be frizzed, and my lady's flounces newly turned, and they will learn enough of the fashions and see enough of the sights to serve them for another ten years. Ah! my pretty Stewart, you little know whom you have flouted, you little know the plot that is toward."

Morris smiled at the singular punishment.

"Who is the lord to be?" she asked.

"Oh! I don't know; there ought to be no difficulty in finding a fool, and perhaps his Grace of Richmond will serve as well as another."

And she laughed softly to herself at the thought of her stratagem, and was in high good humour for the rest of the drive.

CHAPTER XVIII

A GAME OF CHESS.

It was late when my Lady Castlemaine arrived home, and Captain Pentreith had already been in attendance for upwards of an hour they said.

"In that case he can easily wait another one, till I am ready to see him," said my lady.

But Captain Pentreith had many things to think of that afternoon and hardly noticed the flight of time. The disquieting fact that Laverick, the apothecary, and the unnoticed lad on board the *Espiritu Santo* were one and the same became far worse when he reflected that Lady Castlemaine also had some inkling of a chapter in his past life he fain would have blotted out. Of course it was Laverick that had told her, no one else could have done so, unless—he clung to a straw—unless, perchance,

my lady had been guessing very cleverly. That he had followed the sea for some years was a fact well known, that he had followed it with a fine impartiality, now privateering with Rupert, now thundering against the Dutch with Blake, this also was an open secret; but that it was he that had been the leading spirit, the contriver of her daring exploits, the pitiless and dreaded captain of the notorious buccaneer, this he thought for ever hidden in that far lagoon. And now—of course it might have been a chance guess of my Lady Castlemaine's, but in face of what he had lately learnt, this was hardly likely. Then Laverick must be a very dangerous man. The Captain considered the problem in all its aspects, and the more he considered the gloomier it became. The *Espiritu Santo* that a few years since had been the terror of the seas; the *Espiritu Santo* that could overhaul her victim two feet for one, that struck and left no trace; the *Espiritu Santo*, theme of many a fo'castle story, many a winter's tale, and that had vanished at the last so utterly into the blue inane. Dead and done with, so he had thought, dead and done with, and the whole atrocious secret, now that Simon Rutherford was gone, his alone. So he had fondly thought, thought till

lately,—and now, here and in London was one that knew of the Acapulco galleon, the fierce entry, the fight at the poop, the decks awash with blood, the oaths, the shouts, the groans, the last despairing shrieks as she sank into the main; here was one that knew of the *Bona-venture*, the *Nonsuch*, the *Little Secret*, the *Jesus*, the *Golden Hind*, and many another tall ship that had sailed over the brim of the horizon into silence. Yes, surely, Master Laverick was a dangerous man.

The flush of her drive was still on Lady Castlemaine's cheeks as Captain Pentreith entered, and his involuntary look of admiration did not escape her.

"I'm afraid I've kept you waiting?"

"I have been only too happy to wait," said he.

She laughed a little, half in triumph, half nervously. There was that about him that fretted her, yet subdued. The solid figure of the man, set square, the sombre face, the strong reserve; it piqued her pride, this dominating personality of his, so courteous, yet so real.

"Have you any news?" she asked, motioning him to a seat.

"Yes, I have news, important news, so important that I can hardly realise it myself yet, but first of

all, I must thank you for that message about the convoy."

"It came in time?"

"Just in the nick of time to sell my shares to——"

"To whom this time?"

"Alderman Bakewell mostly."

"Then madame his wife—Alderwoman Bakewell, let us call her—will have to be content with a feather or two less and a patch or two less, that is all. But what have you to tell me?"

"I have something to ask *you* first," said he.

"And what is that?" she demanded.

He was looking at her steadily, and at length she dropped her eyes. It annoyed her that she had done so, and she glanced up again defiantly.

"It was a little matter at the end of our last interview. I did not quite grasp it at the time, but on thinking it over it appeared that you were making a very grave accusation."

"Against whom?"

"Myself."

"I do not understand."

"Neither did I at the time. I am a plain man—plain of speech, quite unskilled in these Court tricks of irony, but the fact is you were accusing me of one of the worst of crimes——"

“I—accusing you of crime—what crime?”

“The crime of piracy; you must excuse my bluntness, but the matter is serious. ‘No peace beyond the line,’ you said, ‘no prey, no pay,’ maxims it is well known these miscreants fight under. The inference is obvious.”

“You are speaking in riddles, Captain Pentreith; be more explicit.”

He looked at her for some moments, but without speaking.

“You talk in riddles,” she reiterated.

“I am a man of business, Lady Castlemaine,” said he at length, “and this play of chess will not carry us very far. Now, every one knows that at one period of my life I was privateering with Prince Rupert in the West Indies, but there is all the difference in the world between these letters of marque and common piracy—the one is legitimate warfare, the other murder; do you understand?”

“Oh, yes, perfectly.”

“Ah, well, in that case I should be more cautious before adopting as facts stray insinuations left by Master Laverick.”

An involuntary look of surprise passed across her face, and he saw that he had not been mistaken.

“These accusations—surely you forget yourself, Captain Pentreith.”

"Lady Castlemaine," said he, leaning forward, "come, don't let us quarrel. I know a woman's love of power, and can excuse it. Perhaps you thought to gain some advantage over me, but really, this Laverick, such a needy rascal as he is, his word on 'Change would hardly be sufficient for a tavern score. Besides, I have known all about it for a long time—his journey to Wrenford at the heels of Sir Rupert Bligh, his apothecary's disguise, his many visits here——"

"You have been spying on me, then?"

"I have many agents," returned the other composedly, "and believe me, I sincerely regret that in this case I have found them necessary."

She tapped her foot impatiently; this calm exposure galled her to the quick.

"You assume the tones of a preacher, Master Pentreith; the rôle does not suit you."

"No, I should never have had sufficient levity for a bishop."

Lady Castlemaine sipped her tea for some time in silence. It was a new experience for her this. Hitherto, and unfortunately for herself, she had very seldom failed in getting her own way: by cajolery, petulance, blandishment, but of late by downright imperiousness and ill-temper, she had become so accustomed to have every one accede to

her slightest wish that the least opposition would induce a fit of ungovernable rage, nearly approaching madness. And here was one quite indifferent as to whether he pleased her or not, one who had put her conduct in a despicable light, had gone even the length of rebuke, while she—well, it astonished her to find that she had nothing to say.

Presently he rose as if to leave.

“Are you going already? I thought you had some news.”

Certainly Morris would hardly have believed her ears; my lady’s voice, timid almost.

“It is getting late, and I have other business to attend to.”

“But your news?”

“I am sorry it should end like this,” said he, “but it cannot be helped. The past arrangement between us has been very profitable, and your early information in political matters has often enabled me to speculate in the City with such good effect that it has brought in many thousands to both of us. This you know, and for my part I should have wished for things to have continued as before, had it been possible.”

“Possible — I don’t understand — why not possible?”

“Because I find, Lady Castlemaine, that in pur-

suit of private ends of your own you have employed this man Laverick, that you have listened to and believed some very malignant gossip of his, and that my affairs in the city are far too delicate and involved to run any risk of having them injured by a starveling scrivener or apothecary, or whatever he is. Do I make myself clear?"

His manner was peremptory, rough almost.

"Will you sit down again for a little?" said she, motioning to a chair. It was to gain time to think, even for a few seconds, and though denial was impossible, she more than ever wondered to hear herself rated as a schoolgirl.

"So you think you cannot trust me?"

"I can only judge by the past," said he.

"But supposing I dismiss this Laverick?"

Here was indeed the taming of a shrew, and Captain Pentreith had reason to congratulate himself on the result of his dexterity. Her curiosity, it was clear, was only equalled by her desire for supremacy at Court, and he knew that by carefully playing on these strings he could yet make her subservient to his designs. Moreover, women love to be bullied: this also he knew.

"Really, Lady Castlemaine, it is a matter of indifference to me whether you dismiss him or not, but, to put it in plain English, the fact remains that

you have been playing double, and I dare not let my secret fall into untrustworthy hands."

"Untrustworthy—what do you mean, sir?"

"This is a matter of business, not sentiment, Lady Castlemaine, and I mean what I say."

She was looking at him with half-closed eyes.

"I could have that insult avenged," said she.

"What, by those Whitehall bravos, eh? Well, well, I will take my chance. Besides, I thought an assault on a poor player now and again was the limit of their prowess."

He laughed scornfully, and though it stung her like a lash she remained silent.

"I've never failed to look any man between the eyes yet," he went on, "save one man, and he is dead, dead and buried, till some poltroons had the old lion up to hang him at Tyburn."

"So our Captain is a Puritan then," said she, "one of the remnant in Israel, that even now only bows the knee to Baal in order to gain some signal favour from the Saints."

The faintest flicker of a smile passed over his face as he looked at her.

"The gibe is excusable, but then every one knows I fought under Blake, and a pleasure to be there when he took his ship into action,—the sea artist that he was."

An involuntary tightening of his hands, a firmer set to the mouth : these she noticed.

"It's well for you there was an Act of Oblivion : you seem to have fought on either side with a fine impartiality."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"But the Dutch—now," she went on, "the days of pike and gun, are they at an end?"

"I have applied for a ship."

"You?" she cried in astonishment.

"Yes, to my Lord Sandwich."

She looked at him incredulously.

"But your secret?"

This seemed to be mightily amusing to Captain Pentreith, for he laughed very heartily.

"My secret, Lady Castlemaine, 'tis very like will be knocked into space by a Dutch round-shot. Now I could almost weep at this, so pathetic is it." He paused for a moment, looking at her sardonically, "but why is it," he went on, "why is it that these poetasters have had their way so long, and that a man should be obliged to unlearn in middle age that which was taught him as very gospel in his youth? Your sonneteer will paint you a woman with all the softer virtues under heaven, and all, forsooth, because she has a wandering ringlet, or a dimple at her mouth."

My lady was waxing impatient.

"I don't understand what you mean, Captain."

This also seemed to amuse him.

"To all you ladies now at land,
We men at sea indite."

And the lovelorn sailor gets a bullet through his heart and the lady counts the contents of his strong-box. Now have you ever noticed, Lady Castlemaine, in regard to women, that the Bible never makes these mistakes?"

"I've no doubt that all this is very witty, Master Pentreith, but it has nothing to do with your secret."

"Nothing whatever; but first——"

He went to the door to satisfy himself that no one was listening.

"Servants sometimes have a habit," he apologised; "that tapestry there."

"Not a mouse can hide behind."

"One has to be careful, for there's a paper in my pocket here that could set this Court a-packing and Charles on his travels again."

He spoke with unwonted earnestness, but she looked at him incredulously and laughed.

"You mustn't expect me to believe such rodомontade."

"But it may be true, nevertheless."

"Well, let me see it."

"I can hardly do that," he returned.

"Some proof—at the least."

"Say to Charles then, the next time you have an opportunity, 'Young Rutherford knows.'"

"Is that young Rutherford, the friend of Sir Rupert Bligh?"

"Yes."

She looked at him curiously for some moments, and suddenly there came to him the certainty that he had been foolish to trust her.

"Now, here's a fine politician," she laughed, "that preens himself on affairs of state even to the very gossip of the backstairs, while all the time things of which he is perfectly innocent are transacting under his very roof."

"It's my lady who is speaking in riddles now."

"But surely you know he's in love with your daughter."

A flush of anger mounted to his forehead.

"Who says so?" he demanded.

"Nay, do not look murder at me like that. I speak the common talk of the town."

He rose from his seat.

"I am afraid, Lady Castlemaine, we have both been wasting valuable time."

"Yes, I'm afraid I have."

"And I do not wish my daughter's name coupled with such idle gossip."

"We will be very careful," laughed my lady; "we will speak of her with bated breath, her very name shall be sacred."

Captain Pentreith stood looking at her for some moments.

"It is sacred," said he.

.
My Lady Castlemaine sat motionless for a long time after he had gone. And the day sank into twilight and the twilight into night, and the outline of the furniture became indistinct and blurred, and the story of Susannah faded from the walls. But my lady had seen the look of scorn in his eyes and was glad of the darkness that hid from all the world the anger, the remorse—and the tears.



CHAPTER XIX.

A DIFFICULT FRIENDSHIP.

THE contents of the mysterious packet once deciphered, Anthony, much to the surprise of Mr Critchett and the lawyer, showed not the slightest inclination to trouble himself further in the matter. Primarily he had no belief in the story there set forth, but further than this the possibility of something shameful to his guardian's memory coming to light quite determined him on his course of inaction.

"Let sleeping dogs lie," he had said, "and besides, the whole thing is so palpably a delusion."

But Mr Applegate was more cautious.

"That may be so, but still it remains to be proved."

"My poor guardian had strange extravagances towards the end—and I've often heard of people getting these exalted notions."

"But the papers were hidden two or three years ago."

"Yes, but he had been at his alchemy ever since I can remember, and I'd sooner believe that he had discovered the great arcanum itself than that I was——"

"Hush! walls have ears."

Anthony laughed.

"Well, if it turns out true, Mr Critchett, I'll make you my librarian-in-chief."

And though Mr Applegate was inclined to take a far more serious view of the matter, nothing could induce Anthony to treat it other than as a chimera.

"I'll make a copy of it, if you like," he said. But it was merely out of complaisance, and, once made, was thrust into a drawer and forgotten, so that Peter's theft passed quite unnoticed.

For Anthony had other things to attend to, and of far greater moment, as he considered. The siege of Gracious Street, for example, the secret of which Mr Applegate had somehow managed to fathom, and give his victim in consequence little respite from sly allusion: the siege of Gracious Street, that had prospered better of late, but brought to an abrupt conclusion for the present by the departure of the "fair" to the country. Then there was his friendship for Sir Rupert Bligh, that had ripened

strangely. In the streets, in the Park, at the theatres, these two were continually together, and though some might hint that a sufficient reason could be found in the growing volume of Sir Rupert's debts, others, more charitably disposed, contented themselves with a trite classical comparison, and so let the matter rest. Theirs is a thankless task that set themselves to find a *caput mortuum* of selfishness at the bottom of every human action, yet, strange as it may seem, Morris had indubitably divined one reason for their close relationship. They were jealous of one another—inflammably jealous,—and not only was the name of Dorothy Pentreith studiously avoided when they met, but even, by a tacit consent, the very neighbourhood of her house. Another motive on Sir Rupert's part might be found in his settled conviction that old Simon Rutherford was, if not in actual possession of the Philosopher's Stone, at any rate within an ace of projection at the time of his death. Like other young men of fashion of the day, he had devoted no inconsiderable portion of his time to science, and this, begun in the first instance as a dilettante, had gradually deepened into a settled pursuit. At his chambers in the Temple there had been a room fitted up as a laboratory, and here, black and grimy from his

toil, the young saunterer of the Mall was often to be found. An assiduous attendant at Gresham College in the first instance, the slow and laborious experiments there performed, infant science struggling with its alphabet, soon failed to satisfy his swelling fancies, and falling in about this time with a chemical treatise of Paracelsus, his studies thenceforth were directed solely towards the great arcanum. Then followed Charles' commission, his visit to Wrenford, and his interview with Simon Rutherford, whom he left that afternoon fully convinced not only of his close approximation to the perfect amalgam, but also that it was to further this very purpose that Charles had been providing him with monies. For the rest, and to have done with this sorry business of analysis, the basis of their friendship was sincere and genuine. Young and in health and in the flower of their days, with life full of movement and bravery, and the earth a sheer delight, friendship becomes not only salutary, ennobling, and necessary, but wellnigh inevitable.

The same fair weather that attracted Lady Castlemaine to the Park that afternoon proved also stronger than Sir Rupert Bligh's alchemical zeal. For the sun shone so jollily through the lattice windows, and the trees in the Temple Gardens whispered so many cogent arguments and reasons

manifest why he should immediately clap on his hat and go out of doors, that resistance became at last impossible.

"Just coming to fetch you out of this," cried Anthony as they met on the stairs.

"Well, I meant to stay in this afternoon, but the sun was too much for me, and I was house-tired, and, after all, much study is a weariness to the flesh."

Together the young men made their way to the Park, where they sat down beneath the shade of some lime trees at a little distance from the roadway.

"Where we can see without being seen too much," said Sir Rupert.

It was early in the afternoon when they first arrived, but as time went on the coaches and horses and people afoot greatly increased in number.

"We are not the only ones who take the air," said Anthony.

"No, there's all the world and his wife, or the world and somebody else's wife; but look, there's Lady Faulconberg."

"Mary Cromwell that was?"

"Yes, the same, and times change. But most of these people here are new, for the late troubles knocked half the Cavaliers on the head and the

other half in the purse—which is much the same thing as far as London's concerned."

And the two sat watching the ever-shifting comedy of bows and smiles.

"Ah! there's Lady Castlemaine," said Anthony.

"And her coach," laughed Sir Rupert, for the story had leaked out; "don't forget the amazing and never-to-be-sufficiently-admired coach that has so put the Stewart's nose out of joint—but they are talking about us, I think: she is too far off to bow."

"Who is that with her?"

"That's the foil—I forget her name,—the setting to the jewel. Yes, she's clever. But see, there's the King—now for the comic tragedy."

Approaching on horseback were Charles and Frances Stewart, and as yet they had not noticed Lady Castlemaine.

"Now, look," cried Sir Rupert in great glee; "just watch. Look! they see her now. Begad! her smile; have you ever seen anything so perfect? What an actress! how superb! and that poor little Stewart—not a chance."

"She is going to give a masque, I hear."

"Lady Castlemaine, yes. It's *minghing mallecho*, it means mischief. She wanted me to take a part, but I couldn't promise; I might not be here."

"How so?"

"I applied the other day for sea."

"For sea!" cried Anthony in astonishment.

"Yes, to Albemarle, but, as a matter of fact, I don't think I shall be appointed. For one thing, now that the Dutch are really out, applications have poured in; besides, there is a good deal of jealousy, it seems, that younger men should be put in in the place of the old and experienced officers."

"Should I have a chance?" Anthony asked.

Sir Rupert deliberated.

"I don't think so," said he; "the reasons I have given, and also——"

He paused in some embarrassment, and Anthony looked at him inquiringly.

"Also what?" he asked.

Sir Rupert flushed.

"I am on the horns of a dilemma," said he. "I cannot explain quite, but you may take it as a fact."

Though Anthony often wondered what it was that had brought Sir Rupert Bligh to Wrenford, he had never questioned him upon the subject. Certainly no suspicion of the interview between his guardian and the young courtier had ever crossed his mind, and though more than once he had been on the point of asking him outright, the thought that his new-found friend might resent his curiosity

as an impertinence had always acted as a deterrent. As for Sir Rupert, he was troubled by the thought that his own conduct in the business had not been honourable, and yet was prevented from making a full confession by his promise of secrecy to the King.

“So you think I could not get a commission?”

Sir Rupert nodded.

“But why? Surely you know——”

“I have said that I cannot explain.”

Both were silent for a long time, watching with a kind of dogged sullenness the passers-by; both were fearful of speech, lest the fine-spun of their new friendship should be brushed away.

At length Sir Rupert ventured—

“’Tis a pity to quarrel, Anthony, but though my tongue is tied in some respects, I can tell you this much, that I was within an ace of robbing you once.”

Anthony looked at him.

“Why do you tell me this?” he asked.

“You guessed it, then?”

“Partly.”

“I thought the dead man had left the secret with you—the secret of his studies,—and that you had the papers actually in your pocket.”

“And—and Captain Pentreith had the same idea.”

"I thought so then, not now."

"And he was the instigator?" said Anthony in low tones.

"I don't know that I ought to say that."

"One or two things have puzzled me," Anthony went on—"that apothecary, for instance; who was he?"

"I know no more than you do."

"And that physician that came upon the scene so strangely?"

"Him also I know nothing about."

Anthony glanced swiftly at his companion, and felt that he was speaking the truth.

"But all this doesn't alter the fact that I've behaved very badly," Sir Rupert went on; "will you forgive me?"

"I have,—long ago," said Anthony; "but come! it's getting dusk, and there's astrologer Lilly to meet at seven."

And both felt a sense of relief that a dangerous corner had been turned.



CHAPTER XX.

THE LAST OF THE *ESPIRITU SANTO*.

THE "Triple Tunne," near the Temple, was a house of resort principally of lawyers and their clients. Students also clinked the can here, exercising new-fledged wits on tort and equity, and many an afternoon swam away on a sea of sack that had better been devoted to case and precedent. A dingy, smoke-dried tavern, innocent of paint, and this not on account of poverty, but of the inherent prejudices of its patrons.

"'Little Westminster,' they call it," explained Sir Rupert, "and more cases settled here than in the other place."

Mr Lilly had not been in, the landlord was sure of that, and as a matter of fact what with the fine weather, and what with the Dutch, and what with people getting scared about the sickness, trade was at a standstill.

"Why, I have been sitting here all the afternoon nodding over the news book, and deuce of a soul to speak to till that gentleman came in two or three minutes ago."

They glanced round at this, and saw to their surprise that it was Captain Pentreith seated in the chimney-corner.

A shade of embarrassment, almost of annoyance, was on his face as he rose to greet them.

"A strange chance," said he, "for I have not been in this place a twenty year."

"We had an appointment," Sir Rupert explained, "but our friend, it appears, has not yet arrived."

All three now sat down before the fire, but there was a constraint between them that even the arrival of the bustling landlord with wine could not dispel. Mutual healths were drunk, and then a silence which was fast becoming intolerable.

"Is it true, sir, the Dutch are out at last?" said Anthony, more from a desire of making conversation than any other motive.

"They have been reported off the Texel, and I am holding myself in readiness to embark."

The young men looked their surprise.

"I thought you had retired from any active service."

"So thought I till this Dutch business; but things are serious and they want available men. The *Mary* I shall probably get, knowing her points."

"Captain Jeremy Smith has applied for her," said Sir Rupert.

"Has he? Well, we shall see."

"And I also for the same ship."

Captain Pentreith smiled, sardonically as Anthony thought.

"His Majesty will have need of us all, doubtless—but that friend of yours is late."

The suggestion came as a relief, and the two younger men rose to go.

"He'll hardly come now," said Sir Rupert; "probably he is at my rooms."

The Captain poured out the remainder of the wine.

"We shall meet then at sea again, perhaps."

"The three of us—to drub the Dutch," cried Sir Rupert.

And the toast was duly honoured.

The Captain felt a sense of relief when they had gone. It was for this very reason of quietness that he had elected to walk home from Lady Castlemaine's by way of the Temple, and little dreamt to encounter any one he knew at the "Triple Tunne."

"I shan't be disturbed a second time."

And throwing another log on the fire, he ordered more wine, and settled himself closer in the corner.

But the landlord had notions of a gossip. He had read his News Letter to the last syllable, to say nothing of a most entrancing pamphlet on a late appearance of the devil in Wiltshire, and was aching for a talk.

"The nights still keep chilly, sir," said he.

"They do."

"But we ought to have warm weather, now the Dutch are out."

"Yes, we ought."

"Warm for them I mean, of course."

"Of course."

This was hardly promising, but the landlord made one last attempt.

"These are strange doings with the devil in Wiltshire, sir," said he, "in a book that was given me yesterday, and they say very true."

"Yes, I believe his habits have always been considered irregular."

And mine host, glancing for a moment at his guest's dark face, thereafter gave up all idea of a gossip.

For Captain Pentreith had little desire for conversation just then, and his own affairs, that had

become so difficult of late, were quite sufficient to occupy his thoughts.

“Young Rutherford. Begad! his new-found honours sit very lightly on him, or else he’s determined not to move in so inflammable a business. And in love with my daughter, eh! And she with him, for aught I know, which makes matters worse.”

Neither had his interview with the Castlemaine been a success; for he had dropped hints that, coupled with Laverick’s suggestions, might give her a clue to the whole secret, and, worse still, had insulted her by the implied scorn of his last words.

“Which women never forgive,” thought he.

Even in the matter of the commission, confidently as he had spoken, there was delay, and although his abilities and experience were well known to my Lord Sandwich and those at the Navy Office, Captain Pentreith began to suspect that pressure was being exercised to prevent his appointment.

“And this is all I have to mend matters with, eh?”

He took the document from his pocket—Anthony’s copy—and read it again very carefully.

“It’s this nurse down at Wrenford, this ‘Nan,’

who seems to be the *deus ex machina* that knows everything. Now if I can get hold of the original of this, and the marriage certificate, a journey down there might make a great deal of difference."

His face began to brighten a little and the knot in his forehead to relax.

"Blackmail—yes, an ugly word; coerce let us say; coerce Charles Rex, and perhaps, if the times are favourable and he doesn't mend his ways, send him on his travels again, who knows?"

And as he sat there, castle after castle of ambition rose before him, each more extravagant and gorgeous than the preceding, till at length all sense of the dangers and difficulties immediately to be faced had vanished quite away. He was recalled to a sense of his surroundings by the sound of some one outside the window whistling a catch. A languid annoyance at first he felt, as of one just awakening from a sleep, till suddenly his interest was painfully aroused by the words and aria that he knew so well:—

"The dead man's hair is dank and wet,
His eyes are glazed, his teeth are set.
If the mother that loved to hear him croon
Could see him now by the light of the moon,
At the four cross-roads."

The words were softly sung like a man singing to while away the time, and repeated with something of unction as if enjoyed. Captain Pentreith looked furtively round at the landlord, who was dozing behind the bar, then at the window, and his heart stood still for a moment—for a white face was peering at him through the lattice.

“Who the devil’s that?”

This from the landlord, who, opening his eyes at that moment, jumped from his seat and hastened towards the window. But the man vanished at his approach.

“Who was that? A friend of yours?”

“I haven’t that honour, I’m afraid.”

But the landlord was suspicious, or pretended to be, having awakened from his doze in an ill-humour, and remembering his set-back earlier in the evening, stumped about the room with many a *sotto voce* as to “dangerous times,” and “one never knew,” and “accomplices,” and the like, to all of which Captain Pentreith was irritatingly oblivious.

“And a quiet place this of yours, my landlord,” said he as he paid his score, “more like a church than an inn.”

The moon was riding high in the heavens when he emerged from the tavern, and the alleyways and courts of the Temple were silent and deserted.

Here and there a light in some lattice might mark the student, but for the most part the windows were dark and shuttered, and the place like a city of the dead. The sound of his footsteps on the flags echoed eerily, returning from unexpected angles, and more than once he stopped abruptly—to listen.

“There’s nothing but imagination in all this,” he muttered, glancing nevertheless uneasily over his shoulder and walking on tiptoe, “imagination, and yet,—well,—that d——d song has shaken me.”

He was approaching the Temple Church when suddenly he became aware of a figure standing in the shadow of the porch. The man’s back was towards him, a tall, spare man, but Captain Pentreith knew that the hour had come. Stepping behind a buttress he unsheathed his sword and, creeping in the shadows, was almost upon him before Laverick turned round.

“Pentreith!” he gasped, springing aside and drawing his weapon.

But a fierce pass was the only answer, which, getting inside his guard, passed through the doublet and seared his flesh like a hot iron. Thereafter not another word spoken, no sound but their sharp, short gasps and the clash of steel, for both knew it

was the deadliest earnest, no mercy given or asked, and in the next few moments life or death. And Captain Pentreith was at a disadvantage, for not only was the rapier a weapon with which he was to some extent unfamiliar, but he was older by some twenty years, and youth will be served. Laverick saw this, and gradually the fear induced by the reputation of the dreaded Captain was succeeded by a wave of confidence as he felt his opponent giving way before him and weakening in defence.

"The paper, give me that," he cried, and with the words made a sharp lunge that, piercing the Captain's sleeve, sent a streak of agony up his right arm. But Pentreith gave no sign and never for one single instant took his eyes from his opponent's face, yet he felt fatigue and faintness momentarily increasing upon him, and knew that unless he could speedily bring the affair to an issue all was at an end. Thus it went on for a few seconds, till Laverick, pressing forward with ever-increasing eagerness, stumbled on an inequality of the pavement, and his opponent, grappling him at that instant by the throat, struck fiercely on the up-turned face with the pommel of his sword.

"A foul! a foul!" screamed the other.

But Pentreith struck and struck till he bore him to the ground, and struck and struck till he was

silent, and he looked at the upturned face for a moment before he slunk away.

“But is he dead?”

He had only gone a few paces, then, sick and dizzy, clung to the railings.

“Is he dead?”

He crept back and watched from the shadows, and there was a twitching in one of the hands and a champing of the jaws. Then he knelt beside the prostrate man and searched for his dagger. The face was swollen and bruised, the twitching of the hand still continued and the movement of the mouth, and the sight maddened him.

“The last of the *Espiritu Santo*, eh! and the last song.”

He turned Laverick's head to one side so as to have the neck more conveniently exposed, then feeling for the artery pressed the dagger in. A spout of blood and a cry—non-human, an animal screech, then a shudder and a stillness.

Captain Pentreith crept into the shadow again, shivering, and he stared at the body entranced. But the sound of a lattice opening recalled him to himself, then a shouting and the sound of footsteps as of men running, and the waving of lanterns in the distance. His face was in a sweat and he was sick, and had just time to crawl into the darkness of

the porch where by a chance the door of the church had been left open. Then, with a final effort, he passed inside, shot the bolt, and fainted.

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The sun was streaming through the windows when he awoke, striking the black Knights Templars with its shafts of light. But no trace of the last night's combat was outside, save a sticky stain on the flags, as he slunk away looking fearfully behind him—an affront to the morning.

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CHAPTER XXI.

MY LADY'S PREPARATIONS.

THE masque to be given by my Lady Castlemaine was the talk of the town, and rivalled even the Dutch war and the ever-creeping plague as a subject for curiosity and conjecture. Tales that lost not a whit in the telling were bandied from mouth to mouth, of the expenses to be incurred in the preparations, of the luxury and boundless excess, and many were the allusions to decadent Rome, and many the prophecies of impending ruin. But the gossip of the court and the censures of the city were alike unheeded by my Lady Castlemaine, save as subject for satire.

“Why, let them talk, Morris, if it pleases them : morality is the only vice left to the poor.”

But the Dutch war and the plague between them really upset her ladyship, necessitating, as they

did, an alteration in date. For many of her guests were under orders to join the fleet earlier than was expected, and the plague was beginning to frighten people away from London, with its "Lord have mercy upon us" on so many houses, and its mourners in the streets.

"To come just at this time," she cried, "and the actors will bungle their parts, and the scenery'll be half painted, and the dresses unfinished; was ever anything so trying?"

For Lady Castlemaine had set her heart upon the enterprise, and was doing her utmost to bring it to successful issue. To regain her threatened domination over Charles, to gratify her vengeance on Pentreith, to flout her hated rival, to astonish the town, to glut her Sybaritic love of colour and display, all these combined to make her spare neither time nor money nor energy towards a happy and victorious consummation.

And what a visitation of mercers and goldsmiths, and what relays of milliners and wigmakers and scene-painters and actors and musicians, with the servants, up and down, and my lady here and there, and Morris—everywhere. What a choosing of satins and brocades, what variety of scarfs and gowns, what a wealth of ribbons and lace; and then what a scraping of fiddles and practising of arias

and ballets and dances, fit to drive her Master of the Revels half distraught.

For my lady, ever since her last interview with Captain Pentreith, had been carefully putting this and that together, comparing and conjecturing, till finally she had arrived at certain conclusions which she was determined to put to the test. The King had been paying money from time to time to old Simon Rutherford, this she knew from Laverick, and his nephew, Anthony, was in the secret, this she had gathered from Pentreith. Now it was most unlikely that a chimera such as alchemy should have any influence over Charles, while on the other hand he had been at so little pains to conceal his numerous liaisons, that neither would anything of this kind have been sufficient motive for the payment of money that he so badly needed.

What then?—"Young Rutherford knows all," and she suddenly remembered the rumour that had gone about the Court two or three years back at some wild talk of Commissioner Pett, and what a pressure had been brought to bear to stop the scandal. Well, it was worth a trial at any rate, and for this purpose she had impressed into her service Tom Killigrew, to be the Master of the Revels.

"But in certain parts I must be obeyed," she said.

And he laughingly acquiesced.

Now Master Killigrew with unlimited credit at command, and a genuine enthusiasm for music and the stage, was determined to make this entertainment a thing to be remembered. No man in London had greater influence among the actors, and his acquaintance with the Italian violinists enabled him to gather as goodly a company as any in the kingdom. Signor Baptista himself, after some persuasion, undertook to be responsible for the songs, the dances, the music generally, while as for the masque, Tom Killigrew, despite the shortness of the time and despite the continual interruptions, felt quite confident in his ability to bring it to successful issue.

In the matter of invitations my Lady Castlemaine took relishing enjoyment, and her merriment at times would pass all bounds. For prudery was at a discount in Whitehall, and virtue laughed down the winds. The Queen herself was forced to receive her as a lady-in-waiting, to do battle for Charles' affection with the flaunting beauty, and many a grand dame who a few years before would have bridled at the very mention of Barbara Villiers, now found it convenient to keep her scruples in the back-

ground and cultivate complaisant blindness to the wildest vagaries of the favourite. Invitations therefore were eagerly sought after, schemed for, in many cases even begged for; to have been a guest on this occasion was to argue oneself of the world; and my Lady Castlemaine knowing all these things was able to gratify many a private grudge and be revenged for many a wounding slight.

"There is Lady Winterfield," said Morris, whose all-embracing gossip was particularly serviceable at this time.

"You can strike her name off the list, but I'll ask her husband."

"The Duchess of Besselton, then."

My lady's eyes flashed.

"Oh, yes, Morris, she shall be invited, and I'll send on the morning to offer a thousand apologies and to say it was a mistake. To flout me—she."

"And Mistress Stewart?"

The question was asked doubtingly, but my lady only laughed.

"How can you be so simple? Why, it's the very point to have her here, and you've no conception how gracious I shall be."

"As in the park?"

"More honey-sweet even than that, and yet, mind you, it has crossed my mind whether to send to Master Raby and have the dress that she has making delayed—at the last moment say."

"That would be a stroke indeed," said Morris, laughing.

"No, no, on second thoughts,—no, it would never do, she'd stay away altogether and spoil all."

"You have nothing to be afraid of, madame."

"I know that," said my lady, "but, ah! there's one other—I had nearly forgot—this city beauty—this Dorothy Pentreith."

Morris looked her surprise but said nothing.

"The girl's pretty—I must see her. Yes, and Sir Rupert Bligh shall take the invitation."

But those were days of anxiety for my Lady Castlemaine, despite her laughter, and frankly as she had always acknowledged that everything depended on Charles' favour, it was only of late that she had fully realised how frail the tenure. Beauty will fade, however guarded, charms cease to enslave, fascinations grow to satiety, and—Charles was fickle. Young as she was she had no illusions as to the shrift that would be accorded by her own sex. Bohemianism has never been popular with the English, and the Bohemianism of Whitehall, to euphemise a

phrase, was of a nature too extravagant to last. The reaction against Puritanism, principally confined to the upper classes, was bound to spend itself, and though England might never again become a nation of saints, the aftermath of that tremendous movement was certain to be felt. James too was of very different calibre to his brother; the laxity of the Court sat uneasily upon him, and it was quite possible that his accession to power might be marked by the other extreme of austerity. Considerations such as these, constantly recurring, warned the imperious young beauty to establish her empire on something more lasting than a droop of an eyelid, or the set of a curl. Small was the mercy to be expected from her rivals if she were left penniless and Court favour permanently withdrawn. She had no fancy to play the fair penitent, to form the butt for satire and the pamphleteer, or to have the skirts of outraged hypocrisy drawn aside whenever she passed. Left penniless — that was the key to the business — for lack of money is a wonderful resolver of your friendships,—left penniless—and my Lady Castlemaine decided thenceforth to curb her passion for gambling.

It had been arranged that a ball of short

duration should precede the masque, and for this the banqueting hall served excellently,—a large and lofty room, and as handsomely set forth as any private house in London. The vaulted roof was supported by oaken beams arranged in palm-tree fashion, while the walls were decorated by an alternation of panelling and tapestry, the former delicately moulded, the latter, which my lady had been at particular pains in collecting, the best from the frames of Venice or Flanders. At one end was a raised dais banked in flowers, and opposite to this a gallery for the musicians. The whole room was softly lighted by many candles, and my lady had some reason for her pride as she came to take a last survey.

“But Morris,—what has become of her?—it is time to dress.”

She was about to ring the bell when the door opened and her waiting-woman stood there staring straight before her in a dazed kind of way.

“What is the matter, Morris?”

And my lady was only just in time to catch the swaying figure.

“Come now! drink this.”

The lips were bloodless, the forehead bathed in perspiration, the pulse hardly to be felt.

“Morris ! Morris !”

Lady Castlemaine was beginning to feel alarmed at her stillness.

“Try and take this, — come — ah ! that’s better.”

She had opened her eyes and was staring vacantly about her, then she shivered a little, and a slight colour began to reappear in her face and lips.

“A little more aqua-vitæ, there, that’s it—no, no,—don’t bother yet till you feel better—you can tell me all about it then.”

And my lady would not hear a word till finally Morris sat up on the couch protesting that she was well again.

“I have had a shock,” said she—“poor Master Laverick is dead.”

It was my lady that turned white now.

“Laverick—dead !”

“He was found near the Temple Church—murdered.”

Lady Castlemaine rose from her seat.

“How—when ?”

“He was seen by the sacristan, early morning, and had been dead some hours, stabbed in the neck as they say.”

My lady breathed quickly, feeling a sense of

oppression, as from want of air. This Laverick, so full of life and energy, even as she herself, and now — surely death at the prime was a terrifying anticlimax.

“Has any one been taken?” she asked.

“No, not yet, but there was a scarf——”

“A scarf! what was it like?”

“Of silk they said, of an orange tawny colour, and part of it covered with a dark stain.”

Lady Castlemaine's face was very white now, and it was only by a great effort of control that she could conceal her emotion.

“Was there — was there anything else, Morris?”

“Some one told me that they saw an initial embroidered in one corner, a ‘P.’”

And perhaps it was just as well that the growing dusk concealed my lady's face.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE COMIC TRAGEDY.

RUSTLE of silk and brocade, tapping of high-heeled shoes, languorous flutter of fans in a framing of music, and old Time loves now and again to set his little puppets to such a play and pageantry. What matters if the red lips grow white, and hopeful hearts cease beating, and rose leaves crumble into dust? What matters if the laughter and the music come to an end, and the rustling and footsteps die away down the corridors? What matters it now, and why insult the dainty hours with jejune musings and regrets? For to-night is ours, to-night at least, and eyes are flashing lightnings through veiling lids, and the galliard is a wild and wandering dance, and the sweeping music tingles with the joy of life. But hush, for the dance is ended and there comes, as from an infinite dis-

tance, the faint sound of a violin, then louder and louder, till finally it is joined by the flute-like notes of a boy singing a song.

“Sweet is the swish of the corn,
Soft is the wind in the trees ;
But softer far are my lady’s arms
As she lies in languorous ease.”

And then, when the ripple of applause has died down, the violins are heard again for the Bransles, and the King leads out the Duchess of York, and Prince Rupert Mrs Stewart, and Mr Hamilton my Lady Howard—and all agree that Mrs Stewart looks as sweet as a May morning and dances very finely, and that the King in this respect is not a whit behind any of his courtiers. After that Charles leads my Lady Castlemaine a single coranto, with every one, even the Queen herself, standing up, as is the custom. Poor Katherine ! Poor Queen ! Those who are nearest can see the tears in her eyes, though she is doing her best to smile and put a brave face on the sorry task she has set herself—to make her husband fall in love with her. And this the reason for her presence here to-night, though so galling to her pride ; and this the reason for her gay dress and her jewels, though the last are not half so fine as many others

in the room; and this the reason for her smiles and her arts and her prettiness, that are quite unheeded by that dark and graceful figure there, dancing so well.

But what are her thoughts of the flaunting beauty that is with him, of the Castlemaine in her soft black dress and her diamonds, and the rich fall of old rose silk that sweeps the ground? For jealousy itself cannot deny the splendid white of her neck, the lustre of her hair, the glorious colouring in her cheeks, heightened now by triumph. And what does my lady think of the poor Queen with her foreign ways and broken English and followers in farthingales? Little enough, as one may imagine, for she has long ceased to be a serious rival, and has come to regard her with a good-humoured toleration, kindness even, far more unbearable than a thousand insults. Poor Katherine! with your envy of the humblest housewife that welcomes her man at the threshold. Poor Katherine! with your heart buoyed up by his transient repentance in those happy days when you are ill. Poor Katherine! with your vanities and schemes and coquetries, and grateful acceptance of any the slightest favour shown by him that ought to have no other thoughts but you. Pathetic across the centuries. Poor Queen!

The coranto over, Lady Castlemaine came to her side.

"Your Majesty is not dancing this evening."

"No, not at present; one gets tired of these everlasting Corants and Bransles."

"Yes, they are difficult," said my lady.

"Why not the new French dance then? The steps are quite simple; I will show you."

And Lady Castlemaine did not fail to express her gratitude.

"You really must have one of the new dances," the Queen went on, "even if only to stop some one asking for these dreadful country romps. Why, the Chevalier de Grammont was laughing only yesterday, 'These English,' said he—you know the way he runs on,—'these English only begin to realise that a fashion's out when it's on the point of coming in again.'"

My lady flushed with anger, for the Chevalier was at that moment one of a group of devotees round the beautiful Stewart.

"And yet Monsieur de Grammont is very glad to be in England," said she.

"At the present moment, yes, surely," said the Queen, laughing.

"Though I doubt whether his Majesty is equally pleased," my lady could retort as she saw Charles cross the room to join the same group.

But at that moment Signor Baptista's violins were again heard, and this time it was the Stewart that the King led out to the dance, and she blushed so prettily as Charles offered his hand, and was altogether the shimmering picture of lace and blue and pearls and curly hair that had already turned half the young men about Court into sonneteers and ballad-makers.

"Certainly she's a glorious creature," whispered Sir Rupert.

But Anthony's thoughts were full of another fair face, more beautiful than this, with ringlets more entrancing, and he gave but a languid assent.

"Yet she talks like a schoolgirl," said Killigrew, "and Buckingham can put her into hysterics with tumbling cardhouses down—now, isn't that so?"

This to De Grammont, who had strolled up at that moment.

"What the deuce, you English are never satisfied. Why, look you, here's a face fit to turn the angels envious, and yet you grumble because she does not talk like a Fellow of Trinity."

"But one would prefer some brains."

"Why?"

"Oh! you're incorrigible, we all know that," laughed Killigrew.

"When a woman has brains," said De Grammont, "the devil of it is she never has enough, or at least only enough for mischief. Look at my Lady Castlemaine now, why, she'd burn the house down to roast a joint, and is like to send Charles a-packing if things don't mend."

Anthony was watching the ever-shifting and brilliant scene with a sense of aloofness, distaste even, and listening with but half his mind to the talking and the music and the laughter. Thoughts far removed from Whitehall now occupied most of his waking hours, and though he had yielded to Sir Rupert's earnest persuasions in accepting the invitation, it was reluctantly and under protest. Even now, angrily conscious of being asked for some hidden reason, and rendered uneasy moreover by the dark look that had crossed Charles' face on seeing him that evening, he was casting about for some excuse to leave.

"Don't you see how impossible it is," said Sir Rupert, "she's easily inflammable, I can assure you, and would never forgive the affront."

"But why so exigent about my coming?" exclaimed Anthony peevishly.

"Oh! you can't always be in Gracious Street," returned the other.

Anthony was about to make some angry retort

when Lady Castlemaine beckoned to them from a window recess, partially curtained, and here they were surprised to find that Mistress Stewart also was seated.

"There's a lull in the dancing," said my lady, "and a song toward, I think, and though the poor King looks very disconsolate at losing his partner, I really must make you acquainted with our latest addition to Court—Mr Anthony Rutherford."

The beautiful Stewart was turning red and white under the lashings of my lady's tongue, and Anthony, though he felt angry enough, could find it in his heart to be sorry for her.

"An unpractised and awkward courtier, I'm afraid," said he, smiling.

"Tut," cried my lady, "'tis the easiest trade imaginable, with a few hours in front of the mirror every day, a cant phrase or two, easily learned, and—what shall we say—four anecdotes or points of humour."

"That's too severe," laughed Sir Rupert.

"No, no; there's Sedley, he passes for a wit, and Buckingham, and they have four each, and De Grammont, though he doesn't know it, none at all. As for Charles, he numbers six, not counting his Worcester story."

"Oh! was that when he escaped?" cried the

Stewart, childishly eager to talk now that the conversation had drifted within the compass of her understanding.

"He has told you, has he?" said Lady Castlemaine, with a great assumption of interest.

"Oh! many times; how he was travelling for four days and nights through the rain and the mud, with an old green coat on and shoes that made his feet sore, and how he had to run away from a miller that took him for a beggar, and——"

"And how," broke in my lady, "how the master of an inn said that he would not ask him who he was, but knelt down and blessed him, and how he had to plot with a ship's master to get him to France, and how the people at Rouen went into his room to see whether he had stolen anything, and how——"

The beautiful Stewart's face had become quite fallen.

"And he's told you everything too," said she in a voice that vainly tried to conceal her disappointment.

My lady laughed.

"Yes; well, I'm afraid he has, to say nothing of every one else in the room, as well as a good many hundreds outside it; but please go on, perhaps there's something else he hasn't told us at all."

‘ There was no trace of mockery in her voice, and in the face nothing but sympathy and interest, yet the little Stewart’s cheek was hot and flushed, and she looked fit to cry.

“There’s nothing more,” she pouted.

“It’s certainly all new to me,” said Anthony, lying stoutly.

“And to me also,” echoed Sir Rupert.

“Innocents both, then,” retorted my lady; “but here’s the Chevalier de Grammont—you owe him a dance?”

And Mistress Stewart took his hand with obvious relief.

My Lady Castlemaine laughed softly as she watched the retreating figure.

“I sometimes pity men,” said she, “that a dimple or a drooping eyelid or the delicate curve of an ear can make even your gravest divines behave like children.”

“But when beauty and brains both,” said Sir Rupert, bowing.

“Come now, come now, your compliments smell of the lamp, or, rather, in your case, I suppose, the crucible; but tell me,” she added mischievously, “tell me why you failed in Gracious Street.”

A sharp look of annoyance passed over his

face, while Anthony glanced from one to the other in angry astonishment.

"Miss Pentreith was away in the country, but I saw her father."

"And what said the redoubtable Captain?"

Sir Rupert hesitated a moment.

"He said that he could not have come in any case," said he, flushing slightly.

"And what reason did he give?"

My lady looked very dangerous at that moment.

"Oh! some foolish reasons," returned Sir Rupert airily; "nothing worth remembrance."

"Perhaps your friend can enlighten us?"

"I know nothing of the matter," said Anthony, his face very white.

"But surely," said my lady, who, to outer semblance at least, had quite recovered her composure, "surely you know where this elusive flower has hidden herself, and in what Elysian field——"

"Two or three cases of plague occurred in the street," said Anthony, "and this, I believe, was the reason for Miss Pentreith's journey."

Though furious at the tenor of the conversation, his voice was even, his face quite impassive. But my lady was bent on mischief.

"Ah! Sir Rupert, you know the adage, shutting the stable door, and so on, but we poor butterflies

of St James's have no chance with pretty Presbyter's daughters, and as for your courtier, well—'all's fair in love and war,' they say, and these sly country squires—tales will be told."

But here they were interrupted by Charles, who had strolled up at that moment.

"The last coranto before the country dances, I think," said he.

"But we're in Parliament assembled," laughed my lady.

"Then I do dissolve this Parliament," he retorted, taking her hand and bowing to Sir Rupert as he spoke. But though Anthony was standing close behind he took not the slightest notice of him, and, indeed, whispered something quite audibly about "undesirable guests" as he and his partner walked away.

There was silence for a few moments after they had gone.

"I think the Park will be quieter for conversation," said Sir Rupert.

"As you will," returned the other carelessly.

"And swords might be useful against footpads."

"A wise precaution," said Anthony.

The rooms and corridors were crowded with guests as they made their way towards the great staircase. Rich brocades and crimsons, ermines

and satin and old point, tiaras and pendants, rubies and pearls and flashing diamonds, dancing eyes and witcheries and white necks and rippling laughter, and youth and beauty and the pride of life in the fitting setting of those glorious galleries, with their tapestries and paintings and thousand lights. And yet Anthony felt through it all a blank, a void, an aching sense as of half-remembered music, and strange is it how one soft personality can gather to itself all the joy and all the loveliness and all the sunshine in the world.

They had just threaded their way down the great staircase when Anthony, who was a few paces behind, felt himself lightly touched on the elbow. Turning round, he saw a servant in Lady Castlemaine's livery.

"It is Mr Rutherford," whispered the man.

"Yes, I am he, what is it?"

"This letter has just been given me, sir, and they said it was important and to be read at once."

Anthony was about to break the seal when he caught sight of Sir Rupert retracing his steps, a supercilious smile upon his face.

"Perhaps the night air would be dangerous to Mr Rutherford?"

Anthony crushed the letter and thrust it into his pocket.

"I am at your service," said he.

The courtyard was thronged with servants, chairmen and link-boys and grooms, and judging by the laughter and the jests it was evident that liquor for their entertainment had not been overlooked. Indeed, my Lady Castlemaine, who had been accustomed to treat the common citizens as altogether beneath her notice, had had it brought home to her of late, and sharply enough, that she was not a favourite with the people. Stories of her boundless extravagance and her gambling and her influence with the King were common topics in every tavern, and, rightly or wrongly, the rabble of London had come to the conclusion that she was mainly responsible for the inefficiency of the navy and the conduct of the war. Twice lately had her coach been surrounded by an angry crowd, and on the last occasion one of the windows had been broken by a stone.

"Oh! for a troop of horse, Morris, to ride this *canaille* down," she had exclaimed, but on calmer consideration had thought it just as well to gain their goodwill if possible.

"For they might be of use one of these days, Morris, who knows. So tell the cellarman to give them plenty of beer, the only argument they understand."

Threading their way through this crowd with some difficulty, Sir Rupert fastidiously avoiding contact as much as possible, they reached at length the precincts of the Park.

"There's a quiet grove of trees by the lake, there," said Sir Rupert, "and beyond it an open space."

"I leave it to you," Anthony replied.

The night was fine and dry and starlight, and a tang of frost was in the air. They walked on in silence till they came to the borders of the wood, and beyond it the lake, unruffled in the still air.

"Now," said Sir Rupert, suddenly facing round, "what have you said about me to Miss Pentreith?"

"I've never even taken the trouble to discuss either you or your affairs," laughed Anthony.

"You lie," cried the other, throwing his cloak to one side and drawing his sword.

It had been hard to find two more equally matched than these, for though Anthony was the taller and the stronger his opponent was better skilled in the conduct of his weapon. At Ulchester they had had for tutor in such matters an old *maitre d'armes*, who, though a noted swordsman in his day, was so far conservative as never to teach the science otherwise than in terms of the

original Italian. "Punto," "stoccata," "passada," were terms commonly heard at Ulchester when they had faded from the rest of England, and though it mattered but little whether a man was run through in Italian or any other language, the fact remained that many of the newer French terms were not merely *dilettante* but stood for real advances in the science. Anthony was soon made painfully aware of this by a new and unexpected thrust in tierce that he was quite at a loss how to parry, a pass that would have settled the dispute outright had it not been for his extraordinary activity and quickness of eye. Even as it was, he received a skin wound that taught him to watch his opponent's face with greater wariness than heretofore, and use to the utmost the advantages he possessed in height and strength of wrist. A few moments of extreme caution on either side, followed by some rapid passes, when the affair was suddenly brought to an end by a shout from the wood and the appearance of some twenty men, armed with staves and hangers, running towards them.

"The Pressgang," cried Anthony furiously, "this is your doing."

But at that moment his sword was wrenched from his grasp, and though he managed to give one

man a buffet with his fist, and another a shrewd West-country fall, he could not shake himself free from his assailants.

“By gad, help the Dutch if he fights like this. Ned, lay him out for Heaven’s sake.”

And the next moment poor Anthony was knocked senseless with a quarter-staff.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE GREAT ARCANUM.

It was in the great withdrawing-room that the masque took place, and here it was that my lady's passion for tapestry had run riot, for in boldness of outline, in splendour of colour, in delicacy of finish they were hardly to be surpassed; and in England comparable only to those masterpieces of Venetian workmanship—those princely presents from the Council of Ten that adorn the walls of Hampton Court.

“To think of it,” whispered one of the Portuguese ladies to her companion, “and our poor Queen, how little has she to content herself with.”

The first piece of the evening had been written by Master Killigrew himself—a farce in which some misadventures in a Puritan household were depicted with no little humour. The subject was a favourite one with the dramatists, even from the days of

Elizabeth, and at that time more than ever assured of applause and encouragement. Indeed, the materials lay ready at hand, and the extravagancies of the later "Saints" were such as lent themselves to the pen of the satirist. The sour faces, the sombre garb, the nasal twang, the absurd introduction of Scriptural phrases into everyday life were familiar to all, and when to these were added the worldliness, the selfishness and hypocrisy of the later Puritans, it wanted but a touch or two to turn such figures into ridicule and burlesque. A trader selling dishonest wares with sly allusions to the Book of Numbers, a housewife carrying on an intrigue under the nose of her husband with justification from Genesis, a "Saint" making the best use of this world while endeavouring to secure a reversion in the next,—these were the familiar puppets wherewith Master Killigrew very dexterously managed to keep up an almost continuous ripple of amusement.

"Oh! do look," cried the beautiful Stewart, "they've put the preacher in the stocks, and that boy's going to take off his boots and tickle his feet."

And the contagiousness of her merriment set the whole audience a-laughing.

A shade of annoyance passed over the Castle-

maine's face, for though she had managed to secure a seat next to Charles, the new favourite had still her crowd of admirers about her.

"I think Master Killigrew overdoes the buffoonery," said she.

"A *pot-pourri*, I suppose," laughed Charles, "and, when at a loss for something of his own, thieves, like the rest of us. But what is the next piece; there is another, you say?"

"Oh! an old, old story, where one man steals another's birthright—so trite and commonplace the audience will yawn."

She was keenly watching him, and noted with satisfaction a slight compression of his mouth.

"Ah! that's sure to be exciting," said he.

My Lady Castlemaine was fanning herself very languidly.

"Much like Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, perhaps."

And she pretended not to notice that he turned round sharply to look at her.

But the extravaganza was drawing to its close, and with a final scene, wherein a dozen high-crowned Presbyters danced a hornpipe, the curtain came down amidst great plaudits.

And now the attendants extinguish the flam-

beaux one by one, and conversation dies down almost to silence. Then the soft sweeping of a harp, sad music in minor key, strange, exotic, mournful music, and the scene opens with an eastern desert, infinite sandy loneliness, and in the foreground a solitary figure, gazing at the setting sun. He is dressed in the rough skin of some animal of the chase, his bow and spear on the ground by his side, and in his attitude a look of utter weariness and fatigue.

"What have we here," whispers Charles, "a mystery play?"

"It is Esau, your Majesty, a mighty hunter before the Lord."

In the next tableaux blind and aged Isaac is seen lying in his tent, and through the open door can still be seen the glare of the desert. And gradually the old familiar story is unfolded, though in dumb show—not a word spoken. The deception of Rebekah, Jacob's entrance with the savoury meat, his father's doubts, the blessing, the return of Esau, the discovery of the treachery, and at the end—and these the words spoken throughout the piece—his bitter cry, "Bless me, even me also, O my father."

"It is of my contriving, your Majesty," said Lady Castlemaine, who, screened by her fan, had

not taken her eyes for a single instant from his face; "'The Supplanter,' it is called, and well acted, in my opinion."

Charles possessed admirable command over his emotions, but though he affected to be a little bored, she was certain there was a look in his eyes, stealthy, furtive, of terror almost, as he glanced uneasily behind him.

"A pretty piece," said he carelessly, "and the music—well, it is strange music, and has touched even the women. But I should like to see you privately," he added in low tones.

"My boudoir, then, in five minutes," said she.

The room was in darkness when she entered, save for some wan starlight glimmering through the windows, and Charles was seated by the fireplace, his head between his hands.

"I will ring for candles."

"No, no, 'twill serve," said he, "but don't stand there; sit down, and—and tell me what you mean."

"I don't understand."

"Don't lie, Barbara," he cried passionately, "this masque—this play."

Lady Castlemaine was irritatingly complaisant.

"'The Supplanter,' you mean."

"Yes, yes."

"You think it ought to have come first, then," said she; "that Tom Killigrew's farce——"

"Come, this won't serve—you had a design—some one in the room."

"Your Majesty seems to take things very much to heart, and even supposing I did mean anything by this allegory, and that some one in the room had—had really supplanted his brother—what then?"

Charles did not reply immediately.

To discover how much she knew or guessed, and that without overt questioning: it was a difficult problem.

"Barbara," said he, "you have been my evil genius ever since the Hague—surely I have not been ungenerous,—and now——"

"And now you are altogether in her power, Charles Stewart."

Lady Castlemaine gave a slight scream, and Charles started to his feet with an oath; there was a dark and shadowy figure standing at the further end of the room.

"Who are you; how dare——?"

"It is Captain Pentreith," said my lady faintly.

"This was planned—arranged," cried Charles

furiously; "you brought me here—and this fellow, —what do you mean, sir?"

"It will be better if you listen a moment," said Captain Pentreith, stepping towards the window, "and you will see that Lady Castlemaine is quite as surprised as yourself, but——"

"What do you want here?" said Charles.

It had flashed upon him that he might hear something to the purpose.

"I have tried to gain an audience ever since my late unfortunate visit to France," Pentreith went on, "and though it was no fault of mine, I have been insulted and ignored."

"Well."

"I repeat it was no fault of mine if I failed to effect your design of selling yourself to the French king for money."

"Well."

Lady Castlemaine had expected a wild burst of anger, and was astonished at Charles' tone, which was easy and even bantering.

"I am an ill man to cross——"

"I admire you," said Charles, "your effrontery is beyond all praise, but shall I tell you why you have been ignored?"

He paused as if for an answer, but Captain Pentreith made no sign.

“I am an easy-going man,” he went on, “and there are many blackguards about my Court, but—there are limits.”

My lady could see the captain’s dark face dimly in the starlight, and a fit of trembling came over her.

“I have never been a patient man,” said he in low tones, “and can ill bear crossing—even by a Royal Duke.”

“Odd’s hell, sir, what do you mean?” cried Charles in a sudden passion.

“Royal Duke I said, sir, for King of England—King of England—you are not.”

Charles took a step forward, then stopped, and the three stood quite silent.

“Lady Castlemaine has very cleverly guessed the secret, but I—well—I know it; and though Mr Simon Rutherford is quiet enough now, and you no longer find it necessary to buy his silence, there are others to be considered—this lady, for instance, young Anthony, the real heir, and myself—that is, of course, if you still intend to masquerade as the Lord’s anointed.”

Again a silence for a few moments, till Charles suddenly burst into a laugh.

“Tell me,” said he, “tell me then why you murdered Laverick. Lady Castlemaine, call the guard.”

An oath, an involuntary step, and Captain Pentreith's hand was on the hilt of his sword.

"No bullying here, sir," said the King.

"The door is locked," cried my lady.

"What trick is this?" said Charles, striding to her side and shaking the handle, "but damnation—the man's gone."

"Quick," cried my lady, "behind the arras, near the window."

"Odd's fish, he's shot the bolt; the villain will get away after all."

Lady Castlemaine was violently ringing the bell.

"They'll answer it in a moment," said she.

"'Twill be too late," cried Charles, pacing the room in a fever of anger and impatience.

Meanwhile Captain Pentreith had made his way down the narrow staircase that led to the mews, and from thence by a postern to the courtyard, where the crowd of chairs and coaches were preparing for the guests' departure. On one of the latter he noticed the Hamilton arms.

"Your master," said he to the coachman, "has decided to walk to-night. Drive me as far as Charing Cross and then you may go home."

The man looked at him for a moment in surprise, but his manner was so assured that he touched his hat and immediately got on the box.

"It is as well to make as much haste as possible," thought Captain Pentreith, as he settled himself on the cushions.

Dismissing the man at the commencement of the Strand, he walked on for a few paces, and then paused in the shadow of an archway, listening intently for any sound of pursuit. But as yet the street was deserted and silent save for the occasional creaking of a signboard and the distant watch calling the hour.

"Now, if I have any luck," thought he, as he made his way past the gaunt scaffolding and half-finished walls of his Grace of Buckingham's new buildings.

Arrived at the water-gate, he stood there looking anxiously up and down the river. The tide was running swiftly out, swishing and eddying at his feet, prattling with its tiny waves against the stonework and the baulks of timber.

"Damnation, has the fellow forgotten?"

Then he gave a low whistle, and almost immediately a boat, a single scull, emerged from the shelter of some neighbouring reeds.

"Everything quiet?" he asked.

"Quiet as the grave," said the man.

But at that moment there came a sound of distant shouting, and down the river by Whitehall

steps they could hear the crunching of oars against the thole-pins.

“Quick—for your life——”

The fellow worked with a will, and Pentreith kept the boat as much as possible in the shadows near the rushes.

“They’re gaining on us,” panted the man.

“We must shoot the bridge, then, that’s all.”

“It’s madness, it’s running like a mill-race.”

“Pull, pull,” cried Pentreith, “pull—ah! I thought so, they don’t like it with their four oars, they’re lagging astern—the second arch, I’ll take her—now—ah! that was a near thing.”

And they shot beneath London Bridge, the waters roaring round them like a cataract.

Captain Pentreith laughed rantingly.

“I thought they would show the white feather to that, and small blame to them; I wouldn’t care to do it again. But is that the galiot?”

“Yon’s she,” said the boatman, pointing to a small vessel that had just got under way and was drifting down with the tide.

“Ahoy! what boat’s that?” came a voice in Dutch as they slid beneath her counter.

“All’s well,” cried Pentreith in the same language, “show a rope there.”

And a moment later he had clambered on deck.

“Yes, it was as well to have two plans,” he mused, as he leant over the taffrail, “that d——d scarf was nearly the ruin of me. But this secret—well, it’s worth a ransom wherever I go.”

And the city faded away in the distance till it had become a fairy city, and the great spire of Paul’s shadowy as a dream.



CHAPTER XXIV.

OFF LOWESTOFFE, JUNE 3RD, 1665.

ANTHONY was awakened to a painful consciousness by the jolting of the coach, which at length, though after an interminable period as it seemed, drew up with a jerk.

"Here, lend a hand, Tom," cried a man, opening the door, "and if you lay hold of his heels——"

"I think I can walk," said Anthony. He was feeling giddy and faint, and leant heavily on the sailor's arm, but presently the fresh air revived him.

"It's only a step or two," said the man, leading him as he spoke into a courtyard surrounded by lofty stone walls.

Here, lighted by the glare of torches, was a scene of indescribable confusion. Men there were, some silent and dejected, others voluble and raving; some sitting on the stone benches in attitudes of despair, others striding up and down, cursing their

fate, or talking excitedly to any that could be got to listen. Most were of the lower orders, but with a few of a better class, and it was amongst these that complaints were generally the loudest. Women were there also, wives and sweethearts bewailing themselves, running to and fro in search of their loved ones, or clinging to the necks of their men in a passion of weeping and grief.

Presently there came one, a petty officer as Anthony judged, shouldering his way through the crowd. A burly fellow he, with humorsome face, and anxious, as it seemed, to make the best of a sorry business.

"Gentlemen," he began, mounting a sort of rostrum and blowing his whistle by way of commanding silence, "gentlemen, you have now the opportunity of serving against his Majesty's enemies at sea. God save the King. But is this all?" he added in lower tones to a sailor who was standing by his side.

"Every mother's son of them, sir; the streets were nearly empty to-night."

"They're getting devilish shy," said the other; "anyway, it can't be helped! Now then, the *Royal Charles*, men of the *Royal Charles*."

A gang of six sailors marched up, and in their midst three prisoners.

"You're in luck's way, you are, and no mistake, you're serving with his Grace the Duke of York."

But a short pompous man, whom Anthony recognised as a frequenter of the ordinaries at the "Green Lattice," seemed quite of a contrary opinion.

"Do you know, sir, that this is illegal," he cried, "this impressment, utterly illegal. I am a merchant of Botolph's and a liveryman."

"Well, it's your own fault," retorted the other, winking to the crowd, "you shouldn't be out so late."

And a laugh went up, even from his unfortunate companions, as he was hurried away fuming and protesting.

"The *Royal Oak* next, who's for the *Royal Oak*? As stout a ship as ever was, and as stout a captain. Ah! here we are. But, my good woman, you can't go to sea with your husband, and after all it's only just a picnic we're at, out by the Nore yonder, and all back by Saturday for certain, with pockets full of rix-dollars. My Frau thinks more of washing day than she does of my drubbing the Dutch. All right, don't cry like that, and you can go with him as far as the boat, see.—Now the *St George*, Captain Jordan, though devil a bit of the Jordan will they

ever get over. To hell with the Dutch, and God save the King. But what's to do——"

For a man, breathless with haste and dusty from hard riding, was making his way roughly through the press.

"Not a second to lose," he cried, "they're off the coast, and our ships are dropping down this tide."

Such shouting and confusion at the Tower Quay, such weeping and farewells, such desperate hurry as Anthony had never before witnessed, and soon the heavy men-of-war's boats are sweeping down the river.

"And which is my ship?" he ventured.

"The *Mary*."

"Captain Pentreith?"

"No, it's Sir Jeremy Smith that's appointed after all."

Most of the fleet had sailed from the Thames a few days previously, but the *Mary* and one or two of the smaller craft still lay off Greenwich, and it was upon these last that all the pressed men, save Anthony himself, were temporarily placed. But with all their haste, they were only just in time, for even as they came alongside, and he clambered to her deck past the grinning tiers of guns, the anchors were already at the catheads and the great ship under way.

Safely ensconced in his bunk, Anthony read his letter by the light of a smoky and very villainous smelling lamp. It was from Dorothy—only a few brief lines—hinting at possible danger and imploring him to be careful, and though circumstances had so fallen out that the warning came too late, Anthony fell asleep that night, despite the adventures of the day, with a sense of tingling happiness greater than he had ever known.

Very early next morning it was that he had to show a leg, with scarcely time to dress, before two marines came to take him aft.

“So they brought you aboard last night, eh?”

Captain Jeremy Smith was seated at breakfast, a thick-set man with ruddy face, heavy jowl, and the habit of command.

“And taken in the park, as I understand, duelling; but what’s this?”

For that moment Sir Rupert Bligh had entered, and the two young men stood staring at one another with obvious recognition and astonishment.

“I have to offer this gentleman an apology,” said Anthony, after a pause. “I thought it was he that had caused the pressgang to——”

“It was my fault,” cried Sir Rupert, “all my fault,—some idle talk, mere gossip, which I know now to be untrue.”

Sir Jeremy Smith had been looking from one to the other with a kind of grim humour.

"Well, young sirs, I can promise you both a bellyful of fighting," said he, "so you had better shake hands."

Which was done there and then and heartily enough.

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Long reaches of sandy beach and dunes and low cliffs, while inland there stretched a level country of fields and hedgerows and nestling farms. Grey old churches too, thatched and lichen-grown, with ancient towers, time-fronting, four square against the winds. And the sun dances on the blue sea, and the gulls dip and wheel and scream, and the waters make a pleasant prattling against the vessel's timbers, as Anthony stands watching it all for a moment that fine June morning, leaning on the carriage of a gun. Now Lowestoffe swims into view, far away on the port bow, with its little harbour, its masts of fishing vessels, its cottages on the hill, and all its inhabitants crowding the beach to watch the gallanting fleet pass by in its bravery and pennants and bellying sails. For this is no ordinary morning, this of June 3rd, 1665, and many a heart beats painfully at the sight of yet another fleet, dimly

visible on the blue horizon, and riding every whit as proudly. A day for death grips this, with the morning air soon to be sullied by the swart smoke, a day for manhood and the battle lust, the shouting and the screamers of war.

Not a ship was there that went into action that day with a more audacious self-confidence than the *Mary*, and this but a reflex of her captain. For Sir Jeremy Smith, having glanced once or twice at the distant Dutchmen, appeared to dismiss them entirely from his thoughts, and was stumping the quarter-deck as if he had nothing weightier on his mind than the contemplation of a pleasure cruise.

"That's the man to do the business," whispered a gunner; "why, he'd walk into hell if it were in the day's work."

At Lowestoffe Ness the fleet tacked, standing directly out to sea, and Anthony could not help taking a deep breath now and again as he watched the enemies' ships looming up more and more distinctly as the moments passed.

Presently there was the piping of a whistle, and all hands that could be spared were summoned aft. Sir Jeremy Smith was leaning on the rail of the quarter-deck chewing a straw, and ran his eye along the lines of eager upturned faces with a grunt of approval.

"There's a fellow yonder," said he, "that has the d——d Dutch impudence to say he'll lay aboard the Duke's ship. The second in the line, there he is," indicating the vessel with a jerk of his thumb. "Well, of course he couldn't do it, but we'll cut his comb for him and not give him the chance."

A cheer went up, but was waved down peremptorily.

"Plenty of time for the shouting," said he, "but I'll shove her nose in when he closes up, grapple him fore and aft, and then you can do what you like."

The roar of a broadside, the tearing sound of splintered wood, a long-drawn shriek—this is what Anthony remembers at the commencement—the sharp word of command, the thud of the ships meeting, the scramble to the enemy's decks, the first blow——

Now God must have mercy on his creatures for their sins—He must have mercy—surely such days will be forgiven—— |

And Anthony had grown old in a few moments, insufferably old——

Often in after years he has tried to remember what happened in those brief minutes, but a

reversal of all past experience so sudden, so complete, so horrible, left only impressions on his mind as of lightning in a black night. One feeling was uppermost, surprising him even at the time, of the utter joy of this Berserker fury, the lust and the smell of blood. To kill and kill, this was the one thing needful; to kill and kill, to strike down the man before him, to deface God's image in his face, all else in his past life seemed tame and colourless compared with this unholy joy.

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One there was at the break of the poop, leading on the Dutch with shout and encouragement, and animated it would seem with a battle lust even greater than his own. His hair dishevelled, his face streaked with blood, and stripped to the waist, the sweat pouring from his great chest and arms, he was wielding a pike with a concentrated rage and fury demoniacal rather than human.

"Will no one stop that black devil," cried Sir Jeremy Smith, stamping with passion as he saw his men giving way before the furious attack.

But as Anthony sprang forward there came a pistol-shot, and the man who had turned savagely upon this new assailant suddenly threw

up his arms, stumbled, fell, tried for a moment to recover himself, then sinking to his knees rolled upon the deck—dead.

And Anthony saw that it was Captain Pentreith.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN WHICH CHARLES IS QUIT OF SOME ANXIETIES.

HUNDREDS of willing hands there were to help as Anthony and Sir Rupert Bligh sprang ashore, for it was to these two that the honour of carrying news of the victory to Whitehall had been entrusted. And with rough words of commendation from Sir Jeremy Smith, a man not given to words, and to praise still less.

"You have done well, Sir Rupert, and you sir, I wish every pressed man were of the same kidney."

What shouts and rejoicings at the inn, what clapping and hand-shaking, till Sir Rupert and his companion, with numbed fingers and aching wrists, and amidst a final volley of cheers, were only too glad to find themselves at length fairly in the saddle. And what a ride it was, that summer night, as knee to knee they gradually

lessened the distance to London. Mile after mile upon the clean highroad, now at a gallop, now at a canter, with the ring of the horses' hoofs in their ears, the soft wind blowing in their faces, and the hedgerows on either hand mellow in moonlight. Past fields rustling with young corn, past meadows of dewy grass, past wayside ponds and byres, past peaceful farms and hayricks, past lines of whispering elms and grey old churches, weary with immemorial years. On, on, through the summer night, knee by knee, mile after mile, now clattering through a sleeping village, waking the echoes and the dogs, now leading their horses perchance up a weary hill or through some darkling wood, now galloping across a furzy common, wind-swept, moon-clad. On, on, through the summer night, knee by knee, mile after mile, on, on.

But neither spoke until they were a long way on their journey. The events of the day oppressed them. The excitement over, the reaction came, so new, so strange, so horrible, this debauch of blood, they rode as men in a dream.

"And what had he done to me?" exclaimed Anthony with an oath.

Sir Rupert turned inquiringly.

"Some Dutch fellow I struck down—I can see his face now—and perhaps with a wife or a sweetheart yonder," he added with a kind of sob.

"I've been through a nightmare," said the other, passing his hand over his eyes, "a hundred years ago it seems, but ugh! what a brute man can be."

And they rode on in silence for some time, on through the summer night.

"Who shot Captain Pentreith?" asked Anthony suddenly.

"Sir Jeremy Smith."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite."

"Thank God I didn't touch him," cried the other fervently. "But was he recognised, think you?"

"No, I don't think so."

"By the Captain, I mean."

"No, I'm certain of that."

Anthony gave a sigh of relief.

"But the body," objected Sir Rupert. "He was a well-known man, somebody will be sure to——"

"I thought of that," said Anthony, "so two of the men brought him aboard the *Mary* to

be buried as one of our dead. She at any rate must never know."

And again they rode on in silence, many a mile.

At Ipswich they obtained fresh horses, and again at Colchester, where, as they cantered out of the gate into the open country, the first faint streaks of the dawn were just beginning to show themselves above the hills. But, oh! the glory of that summer morning! what a daintiness in the air, what a reawakening of life and hope. And the level rays of the sun dappled the road before them with dancing shadows, and kissed the distant woodlands and turned the upland meadows to a sheen of dewy light.

"Look at it, man," cried Sir Rupert, "and these brain-sick fancies of yours. All's well with the world, I tell you."

"Even war, think you, and death?"

"Even they—God knows His business——"

And at that moment, reaching an open down, they set spurs to their horses and broke into a gallop, shouting as they went like schoolboys.

"But you must acknowledge," said Sir Rupert, when they had settled again to their usual pace, "that after all it is I that ought to hang my

head and cry 'alack-a-day'; it is I that am the Knight of the Doleful Countenance."

Anthony glanced at him swiftly, but said nothing.

"Hope is out of the question," Sir Rupert went on, speaking very rapidly. "Mistress Dorothy thinks no more of me than she does of last year's clouds,—nay, nay, hear me out—I have known it for weeks, months, but would not confess it, even to myself. I would not take defeat—every look, every word, when your name was mentioned, it was obvious, damnably obvious—now here is a clean breast of it at last, and—and I haven't behaved as honourably as I might."

The reins loose on the necks, their horses had come to a walking pace.

"You are the better man of the two," said Anthony in low tones.

Though many an eager look was cast after them as they rode hot-haste through the city, they did not slacken their speed until the gates of Whitehall were reached. Here they were at once conducted to the Matted Gallery, where they found the King and my Lady Castlemaine, the latter seated, the former pacing up and

down with his long strides, and in no very good humour as it seemed.

"You have news?" cried Charles.

"Yes, your Majesty, the fleet has——"

"Stop! not here—my private room will be better."

But my Lady Castlemaine had risen in her eagerness.

"Surely I am to know whether——"

"Madame," interrupted Charles sternly, "you will know well enough in due time—the Queen will inform you."

It was a small, plainly-furnished room to which he led them, and contained little save a picture or two, a few chairs, and a large table littered with papers.

"What news, Sir Rupert?"

"Victory, your Majesty, and——"

"Odd's fish, that's news indeed—they treated me most villainously at the Hague."

"Seventeen taken or sunk, and their whole fleet withdrawn, shattered and broken. Here are the despatches, your Majesty."

Charles broke the seal with eager fingers.

"So, so—good—seventeen it is—perhaps more they say here—good—a tough fight, egad! a tough fight."

He read over the despatch with hurried eyes, grasping essentials.

"Humph! yes. So Evanson was going to board the Admiral, eh! and Smith came between; stout fellow that, and both of you specially mentioned for gallantry, I see."

He sat down and studied the document with more deliberation, interrupted only by the attentions of a little spaniel that persisted in jumping on the table and licking his face.

"Come now, down Floss," said he, stroking its silken head, "this is no affair of yours, Floss—seventeen sunk or taken, and most of them 'first-rates'; this is very pleasant reading, gentlemen. But who's there?"

Sir Rupert stepped to the door.

"It is a letter, your Majesty."

"Pish!" cried Charles, "these letters and despatches and business, surely they ought to know by this time how I hate the very sight of it all. Tell them to go to, to—the other side of the Mall."

"He says it is of great importance, sir," said Sir Rupert, smiling.

"Great importance! that's the very worst bore at Court, that Great Importance! Everything's of 'great importance.' If a washerwoman wants a

new buckbasket or a beadle a new hat, it's of 'great importance.' And, will you believe it, I can't ding it into their foolish noddles that nothing's important. Well, let me have it."

He began the letter with a kind of whimsical impatience, but had scarcely read two lines when Anthony saw a look of most intense relief pass into his face.

"Yes, I will see him. Gentlemen, can I ask you to wait for me in the Matted Gallery? But no; on second thoughts, 'twill be better if you stay, and of course I can rely on your honour to keep anything you may hear quite secret."

He was pacing up and down the room as he spoke, and a moment later, to Anthony's utter astonishment, Mr Applegate appeared.

"Ah, I thought I should surprise you," laughed Charles, as he watched their faces. "Sir Rupert Bligh and your young client here have just returned with the happy news of a great victory, Mr Applegate, to which victory they themselves have both contributed, as I am informed, in no small degree."

Mr Applegate bowed stiffly; he had come prepared with a "mint of phrases," and was taken aback by this unrestrained and easy familiarity. Charles saw his embarrassment and laughed.

“Hitherto, Mr Applegate, I haven’t had the pleasure of your acquaintance. Me you have doubtless heard of, and, as I can see by your face, are entirely disillusioned. But, look you, they take a poor fellow with more frailties than he wots of, put a sceptre in his hand, a crown upon his head, and then complain because he doesn’t quite come up to the standard of his sainted predecessor, Edward the Confessor. Man, I can hardly sneeze but it’s bruited to John o’ Groats.”

Certainly Charles had the manner, and, despite all, was one we call gentleman.

“But worse still,” he went on, “there’s not a Puritan or Presbyterian that doesn’t preach at him; not a cavalier but thinks he has the purse of Fortunatus, and they batter him with business, thrust petitions under his nose, give him documents to read, despatches to sign, letters to write, in season and out of season, Sundays and week-days, till the life of the busiest scrivener in London is idlesse sweet compared with it. But to your story, Mr Applegate.”

Anthony smiled to see the lawyer methodically arranging his papers as of old, and Charles, though he did his best to conceal the fact, was obviously interested.

"It was my duty to my client, your Majesty, to sift this matter to the bottom, and I think I have now obtained a fairly connected history of the whole affair. Mr Simon Rutherford, otherwise Ayscough, had, it appears, been one of those on board the notorious pirate, the *Espiritu Santo*, which, after committing numberless robberies and murders on the high seas, and inflicting untold misery, disappeared at length into the inane."

"I well remember the talk of it," said Charles; "but I'm afraid this is very unpleasant hearing for you, Master Rutherford," he added, turning to where the young man stood.

"I've often suspected it, sir," said Anthony sadly; "but I'd rather hear the truth wherever it leads."

"With him, your Majesty, was associated a certain Captain Batt, otherwise known as Pentreith, and together they scuttled the ship."

"Captain Pentreith, eh!" exclaimed Charles.

"The same, sir, and their principal object it seems was a plot against your Majesty, which plot they hoped to effect if once in England. You will remember that your father, of blessed memory, had an elder brother, Prince Henry, a youth of great promise, who died young. Now it appears there was a servant in the Rutherford

family named Anne or Nan Prestwich, who had been taken as a young girl to see the little prince in his cradle, and it was probably a knowledge of this fact that suggested the idea of a tale of substitution. Whatever the inception of the plot, it seems that about the year 1647 or 1648 Simon Rutherford got into touch with the woman who had been nurse to the infant, and either by bribery or promises of advancement, or some other means, suborned her into signing a document to the effect that she had herself substituted another child, and that this transaction had been witnessed by Anne or Nan Prestwich, whose signature also appears in the attestation. According to this the youth that every one had known as Prince Henry, and whose untimely death all England deplored, was the son of a person in very humble circumstances, while the real prince was Simon Rutherford's elder brother, John, a widower, who had recently died, leaving to his care a young son named Anthony."

"He *was* my uncle, then, after all," cried Anthony.

"Yes, your own and only uncle, your only relative in fact, and your Majesty will perceive the skill with which the plot was laid on considering how easy it would have been, with father and mother both dead and no one but distant connec-

tions, to have discarded all relationship and posed merely as a guardian."

"Astute," mused Charles, "yes, devilish astute; but what induced him to tell Pentreith, I wonder?"

"I don't think he did, your Majesty, at least only to a certain extent, his object of course being to be quit of the ship, and knowing how difficult that would be without the aid of the redoubtable Captain."

"Did any one else escape?"

"Yes, one other, a lad who, luckily for himself, happened to be ashore that day. But I shall come to him directly."

"I am sorry to interrupt," laughed Charles, "and can never sufficiently admire your skill in marshalling this intricate business. But please go on."

"Arrived in England they parted company, and Simon Rutherford, desirous of escaping from his dangerous companion, came to live in the out-of-the-way village of Wrenford, where he spent his time partly in religion and partly in the pursuit of alchemy and the philosopher's stone, in which vain studies he was, I believe, an adept and 'illuminatus.'"

"His reputation was European," interposed Sir Rupert.

"Yes, so I have been given to understand," returned the lawyer drily, "and furthermore, he was so far advanced in this peculiar form of insanity that thinking perhaps the 'elixir vitæ' to be in the very next crucible, considered even the making of a will as a superfluity. A strange madness, a strange madness."

Charles glanced at Sir Rupert and laughed.

"Our friend here does not see eye to eye with you in this matter, Mr Applegate; he is something of an exoteric himself."

"I am sorry to hear it, your Majesty, very sorry, and would recommend a close and unremitting application to torts and equity as a counterblast to such fantasies."

"You hear what he says, Sir Rupert. Now, I call that very sound advice. But I am interrupting again."

"As to means, your Majesty," the lawyer went on, "I have reason to believe that the money made in such a questionable manner on board the *Espiritu Santo* was wholly lost, and that his income was entirely derived from speculations on land and so forth made earlier in life, which speculations had latterly turned out very fortunatély. And now we come to the present year, with my story nearly at an end. The storm, the gallant

rescue, the accidental arrival of Captain Pentreith, the death of Simon Rutherford, and the simultaneous appearance of two other strangers in our village—a travelling apothecary and Sir Rupert Bligh.”

Charles glanced at the courtier, a swift look of intelligence.

“Oh! my part in the mystery is soon told,” said Sir Rupert, “for this same vain ‘fantasy,’ Mr Applegate, induced me to journey to Wrenford to consult him on a point in our mystery, but he dying that same night I judged his heir to be the repository of many of his secrets, and therefore well worth keeping in touch with. This accounts for my part in the affair.”

“I thought as much,” returned the lawyer, “and of course Captain Pentreith’s motives are sufficiently obvious. The apothecary, as I have since found out, was the third and last survivor of the *Espiritu Santo*, a mere lad at the time, one Laverick, who——”

“Laverick!” exclaimed Charles.

“A tall man, your Majesty, and of bad reputation as it seems. But it matters little now, poor fellow, for he was found a few nights since by the Temple Church, stabbed to death.”

“Yes, I heard of that,” said Charles, “and moreover, ’twas Pentreith did it.”

It was Mr Applegate's turn to be astonished.

"Are you certain of this, sir?"

"His kerchief was found there."

The lawyer was silent for a while. "There were certainly reasons sufficient for a man like that," said he at length. "But to continue, I could not of course allow so debateable a business to remain unexamined, and have here ample evidence to prove the whole story a fabrication. To begin with, John Rutherford was never in Scotland, either in infancy or at any other time; secondly, this Anne or Nan Prestwich—an old woman now, but still in the full possession of her faculties—has declared her part of the story to be wholly untrue; and lastly, I had the good luck to discover that the actual nurse had left a written confession as to the falsity of the entire business. Here are the papers, your Majesty."

When he had finished Charles sat for some time lost in thought, and his musings that morning were pleasant. His ancient enemies beaten to the dust and a load of personal anxiety suddenly lifted from his mind. Moreover, and perhaps this the best of all, my Lady Castlemaine had been deprived of a very potent weapon of offence.

"Mr Applegate," said he at length, shaking him very cordially by the hand, "really I don't know

which to admire most—your acuteness or your zeal. Certain it is that you must live in London now, for I shall want your advice in other matters of a like intricacy. And you, sir,” said he, turning round to where Anthony stood, “we should like to have you about us at Court, and, while acknowledging that it is rather hard to have a crown dangled before your eyes only to be snatched away again in this ruthless fashion, believe me, the golden band very often chafes and jades, and it’s no light matter to be set up as a popinjay for every moralist to shoot at. As for you, Sir Rupert, why not take our lawyer’s advice—throw Paracelsus Bombastus and his like into the fire and devote yourself to——”

“Torts and Equity, your Majesty,” laughed the courtier.

“No,” said Charles, “‘Equity,’ not ‘Torts.’”



EPILOGUE.

AGAIN the woods, again the Spring, with the fingers of the All-Pervading painting in purple and green.

But oh! the splendour of that Renaissance what time the brave old Earth, forgetting quite its wrinkles and its wounds and the long, long tale of years, decks itself once more in all the galliardize of youth.

And two there are that walk in glades, dewy with morning, glades where the sunlight dapples and the almond blossoms shimmer and the wind whispers secrets in the trees—two there are—two in Eden,—Anthony and his Beloved.

THE END.

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